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Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

Provisional

6404th meeting

Monday, 18 October 2010, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rugunda	(Uganda)
Members:	Austria	Mr. Mayr-Harting
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mr. Barbalić
	Brazil	Mrs. Viotti
	China	Mr. Li Baodong
	France	Mr. Araud
	Gabon	Mr. Moungara Moussotsi
	Japan	Mr. Nishida
	Lebanon	Mr. Salam
	Mexico	Mr. Heller
	Nigeria	Mr. Onemola
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Anderson

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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10-58828 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Egypt, Iceland, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tunisia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Reuben (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 15 October 2010 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2010/533 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council that will be held on Monday, 18 October 2010, on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to take a seat at the Council table.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Serrano to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Fernandez-Taranco: Six weeks after direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations began in Washington, D.C., we are at an impasse. The parties have not met since 15 September.

On 26 September, despite calls for its continuation from the Middle East Quartet, Israel's partial settlement moratorium in the West Bank expired and was not renewed. Construction that had been frozen resumed in some settlements. President Abbas indicated that he would not continue negotiations unless Israel froze settlement activity.

The Secretary-General has publicly expressed his disappointment that the moratorium was not renewed and reaffirmed that settlement activity is illegal under international law and contrary to the Road Map. He has been in direct and frequent contact with regional leaders, including President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, and has urged all to find a way forward.

On 21 September, the Quartet met in New York, noted the positive impact of the settlement restraint and urged its continuation. The Quartet reiterated that unilateral actions by either party, including settlement activity, would not be recognized by the international community. It encouraged the parties to work together to find a way to ensure that negotiations continued in a constructive manner to resolve all final status issues within one year.

Following consultations with Quartet partners, this position was reiterated in a message that Special Coordinator Serry delivered on behalf of the Secretary-General to the Arab League Summit in Sirte, Libya, on 9 October. In Sirte, the League of Arab States Follow-up Committee of the Arab Peace Initiative supported President Abbas's position not to continue in negotiations unless Israel freezes settlement activity and agreed to reconvene in a month to assess the situation.

The Quartet envoys have been in regular contact and principals are discussing a proposal to meet soon to review developments. We have a brief and crucial window to overcome the current impasse. Intensive diplomatic efforts, led by the United States and supported by all members of the Quartet, are ongoing to create conditions conducive to the continuation of negotiations. These efforts were made even more difficult by the Israeli Government's approval on 14 October of construction tenders for 238 housing units in the settlements of Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev in East Jerusalem, contrary to international law and running directly counter to the Quartet's efforts.

Time is of the essence, and we need progress in the coming weeks. The Secretary-General continues to believe that, if the door to peace closes, it will be very hard to reopen it. There is no alternative to a negotiated settlement resulting in the creation of an independent and viable State of Palestine living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security.

Despite these uncertainties, the State-building agenda of the Palestinian Authority continues to advance. On 21 September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) met in New York. The Committee members recognized that the Palestinian Authority's reform agenda had accelerated in 2010, with critical achievements in public finance reform, infrastructure and the provision of social services. They supported Prime Minister Fayyad's determination to implement the Homestretch to Freedom agenda by August next year. The AHLC welcomed Israeli measures to remove some obstacles to movement in the West Bank and to ease restrictions on some imports to Gaza, while urging further steps, particularly in support of greater private sector-led growth.

As a symbol of continued support for private-sector development, which will ultimately drive the sustainable economic growth that is critical to the future State, on 11 October Prime Minister Fayyad broke ground on the agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley funded by Japan. The park could create 10,000 Palestinian jobs and provide a major boost to the economy. However, as with other infrastructure in Area C, this park will require the Government of Israel to approve the necessary permits.

While in New York, Prime Minister Fayyad briefed AHLC members, as well as Arab League foreign ministers, that commitments of donor funding for 2010 remained critically below what is necessary to ensure that the Palestinian Authority can meet expenses. Reforms have steadily lowered the budget deficit, reducing the Authority's reliance on donor funding for budget support. However, despite the continuing generosity of some donors, commitments for 2010 remain insufficient to ensure that the Palestinian Authority can meet expenses in both Gaza and the West Bank, and the Palestinian Authority faces increasing difficulties in borrowing from domestic banks to cover this shortfall.

There continue to be tensions and violent incidents in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority is working to provide security in areas under its authority and to meet its Road Map commitments to combat terrorist attacks — and reportedly thwarted attempts by militants to launch attacks during the reporting period, underscoring the continuing security challenges on the ground. A sixth battalion of Palestinian national security forces is currently training in Jordan, with international assistance, before being deployed in the West Bank.

Despite Palestinian efforts, Israeli security forces, citing security concerns, conducted 353 operations in the West Bank during the reporting period, in which six Palestinians were killed, including two leaders of the Hamas Izz el-Deen al-Qassam Brigades allegedly involved in the killing of four Israelis near Hebron on 31 August. Also, 157 Palestinians were injured and 330

arrested. Incursions on this scale weaken efforts to build genuine security cooperation. One Palestinian labourer was killed while trying to reach East Jerusalem through the barrier, and another suffered a fatal heart attack.

A total of 44 violent incidents were recorded between local Palestinians and settlers, in which six Palestinians and four Israelis were injured. One Palestinian was shot by a settler on 8 October, and there were two incidents of Palestinians being run over. In a deplorable act of desecration, there was an arson attack by settlers on a mosque near Bethlehem on 4 October. To defuse tension and promote inter-faith tolerance, six rabbis subsequently visited the mosque and donated new Korans to replace those damaged in the blaze. There were also attacks by Palestinians on settlers, including on 26 September, when Palestinians opened fire at an Israeli vehicle near Hebron, injuring a man and his pregnant wife.

Hundreds of olive trees are reported to have been set on fire, poisoned or uprooted by settlers throughout the West Bank in the run-up to the harvest season. Prime Minister Fayyad marked the beginning of the olive harvest on 10 October by participating in olive-picking in the northern West Bank village of Iraq Burin, which has been the scene of repeated attacks by settlers in past months. Much more needs to be done by Israel to prevent violence by extremists against Palestinian civilians under occupation, and to impose the rule of law.

On 13 October, Israel demolished 10 outposts in the West Bank. This is a positive development, which we hope will be followed by further steps towards Israel's Road Map commitment to dismantling outposts erected since March 2001.

The wall partly constructed in deviation from the Green Line and in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice continues to pose significant challenges to the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank. Despite efforts to ease restrictions on movement and access, the number of obstacles in the West Bank remained at 508. On 11 October, an organizer of the anti-wall campaign who advocates peaceful resistance was convicted of incitement and organization and participation in demonstrations, and was sentenced to one year in jail by an Israeli military tribunal.

There were renewed confrontations in sensitive areas of East Jerusalem during the reporting period, underscoring the tensions caused by the presence and expansion of settler communities in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods. On 22 September, a Palestinian was shot and killed by an Israeli private security guard in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan after he was allegedly attacked by Palestinians throwing stones at his car. Violent clashes ensued and spread to other Palestinian neighbourhoods. On 26 September, an Israeli court rejected an appeal claiming ownership of a building by two Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, leaving a further 20 families living in the area at risk of eviction.

The status of the four Palestinian lawmakers from the Hamas-affiliated Change and Reform bloc remains unresolved. This unsustainable situation needs a sensible resolution that ensures that they are not expelled from Jerusalem.

The situation in Gaza remains a source of serious concern. The modest gains of recent months must not obscure the need for more far-reaching measures to ease the blockade, including enabling freer movement of people and exports and a wider range of goods on the commercial market as part of a broader effort to implement all aspects of resolution 1860 (2009).

If we are to make progress, all parties must work to ensure calm. During the reporting period, Palestinian militant groups fired seven rockets and six mortars from Gaza into Israel, while Israeli security forces conducted five air strikes and six incursions into Gaza. Three Palestinian militants and one civilian were killed, while 18 civilians and one militant were injured. We urge all parties to respect international humanitarian law and to halt violence.

During the reporting period, a total of 2,570 truckloads entered Gaza, with a weekly average of 857. Fifty-eight per cent of the imports were food products. In June, prior to the announcement of the new Israeli policy for Gaza, the weekly average was 566 trucks. However, the current imports still represent a third of the June 2007 pre-blockade weekly average. We reiterate that the appropriate way to meet needs in Gaza is through the further opening of legitimate crossings.

I am pleased to report the completion of 151 housing units in Khan Younis, which on Friday,

15 October, began to receive their new inhabitants. Further approvals of United Nations projects have been received from the Government of Israel. While these are only a portion of the total package presented to Israel, they are nevertheless part of an expanding flow of United Nations recovery and construction work, which will begin to address Gaza's immense recovery and reconstruction needs. In that regard, the United Nations will present additional programmes of work before the end of the year and will continue to work with the Government of Israel to streamline implementation arrangements. One immediate step would be for Israel to expand the working hours and days for which the Karni crossing is open.

The de facto Hamas authorities closed down several civilian associations during the reporting period, including a journalists' syndicate and a farmers' union. Some civic groups, including partners in United Nations-implemented projects, have suspended their operations in Gaza, claiming to have experienced increasing pressure from the authorities. In addition, on 19 September, unknown assailants set ablaze a recreation water park in Gaza. We are also concerned that, on 22 September, a Palestinian man was sentenced to death by firing squad after a military tribunal convicted him of collaboration with enemy parties.

We reiterate our concern over the continued captivity of Staff Sergeant Shalit and call for his immediate release. Humanitarian access to him should be granted without further delay. We note reports of a resumption of efforts to conclude an agreement that would secure his release in exchange for the release of a number of the more than 9,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

We continue to support efforts to advance Palestinian reconciliation based on commitments of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. These efforts have been stalled following Hamas's refusal to sign the Egyptian-brokered draft reconciliation proposal. Senior Fatah representatives met with Hamas leader Khaled Mashal in Damascus on 23 September. A further session of talks is expected on 20 October.

As mentioned at the last monthly briefing to the Council (see PV.6388), the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 flotilla incident will discuss and review the interim reports once it had also received a report from Israel. The Israeli commission to examine the maritime incident of 31 May 2010 continues its proceedings, which are now at an advanced stage. We look forward to the continued cooperation of the parties with the Panel and to the Panel's further progress and substantive work.

It remains essential — and indeed urgent — that serious steps are taken to restore the regional tracks of the peace process, in particular between Israel and Syria. Only a comprehensive approach to peace will be sustainable and has the potential to ease tensions in the region. On the ground, the situation in the occupied Golan remained stable but settlement activities continued.

Turning to Lebanon, tensions generated by speculation and allegations related to potential indictments by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon grew steadily in recent weeks. Those tensions were accompanied by a sharp increase in the use of belligerent rhetoric and challenges to State institutions, raising fears of sectarian violence. Against that background, the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Michael C. Williams, held meetings with Lebanese officials and political leaders and called on all sides to tackle difficult issues in an atmosphere of calm. The Secretary-General expressed his support for the work of the Special Tribunal, stressing that it is independent, with a clear mandate from the Security Council, through resolutions 1664 (2006) and 1757 (2007), to uncover the truth and end impunity, and that no one should prejudge the outcome.

On 13 and 14 October, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran conducted an official visit to Lebanon, including to the south of the country. The visit sparked serious concerns in many quarters.

The living conditions of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remained of serious concern. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to face funding shortfalls, both for its regular programmes, aimed at delivering basic services to Palestinian refugees, and for the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Bared camp. We reiterate our call to donors, including countries in the region, to provide vital financial support for the reconstruction efforts, as well as for the work of UNRWA.

The overall situation in the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon remained generally quiet. During the past month Israeli air violations took place on an almost daily basis. The

twelfth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) will be released today.

We must remain collectively committed to the goal of a peace agreement within a year from the start of talks in September. We must overcome the current impasse and — more important — ensure that when talks resume they move intensively and definitively to seek resolutions of the key core issues, including borders. The Secretary-General will continue to work closely with the Quartet and regional and international partners — and the parties themselves — to support this agenda.

The United Nations remains committed to an end to the occupation that began in 1967 and to the goal of establishing an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

The President: I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his statement.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I congratulate you, Sir, and your friendly country Uganda on your presidency of the Security Council. We are confident in your able guidance of the agenda this month. We express appreciation as well to the friendly country of Turkey for its skilled leadership of the Council in September. I also wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

Today, we find ourselves at yet another critical juncture in our long, tormented search for a just and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict — and the realization of peace and security in the Middle East. There are two paths before us that we must all choose from. That choice must be made with full awareness that the path chosen will determine the future prospects for peace and stability in the Middle East region and beyond.

The first choice is clear: to together seize, with full determination, the significant opportunity that is before us to resume and accelerate the peace process, on the basis of its agreed terms of reference for the realization of the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. With good faith and a genuine commitment to international law, relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map, it is this path that will speedily advance us towards the achievement of a final, just resolution of all core issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the issues of refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, water and security, bringing a definitive end to the Israeli military occupation that began in 1967, the independence of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital and a just and agreed solution to the plight of Palestine refugees.

This is the path preferred and supported by the overwhelming majority of the international community. It has been given new impetus by the serious efforts of the Quartet, including with the active engagement and leadership of the United States Administration of President Barack Obama, as well as by the League of Arab States and all other concerned, peace-loving countries. The urgency of pursuing this path is widely recognized as absolutely vital for achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, and for making peace and security a reality in our region.

The second choice is also clear: to allow the intransigence, violations and impunity of one State — Israel, the occupying Power — to not only undermine but to completely sabotage the prospects that remain for realizing the two-State solution for peace. At this critical point in time, it is widely recognized that the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is untenable, unsustainable and volatile as a result of Israel's ongoing illegal actions and provocations against the Palestinian people and their land. It must also then be recognized that if recklessly forced down this path by the occupying Power, we will be taken on a trajectory that will bring only more violence, suffering, loss and instability for both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, as well as the region as a whole, propelling us into yet another era of darkness and taking us further away than ever from our noble goal of realizing a future of peace, security and coexistence in the Middle East.

We come before the Security Council today to appeal once again to the members of this body to uphold their Charter responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. This critical matter must be given due attention, and action should be taken to ensure that it is the first path — the path of peace — that is seized at this moment and resolutely pursued.

Breaches of the law via acts of colonization, aggression and collective punishment against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and contempt for the will of the international community must be confronted and firmly rejected. Israel, the occupying Power, must choose either to pursue the path of peace or to bear responsibility for its obstruction.

The Palestinian leadership has for decades been decisively committed to a peaceful settlement in accordance with the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, beginning with the 1988 Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine and onwards. Our commitment and good faith were displayed once again in our willingness to take part in the recent proximity talks conducted by the United States and in the direct negotiations launched in Washington in September by President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator George Mitchell, despite the less than favourable circumstances in both the political environment and the situation on the ground.

It is well known that the proximity talks were supported by the Palestinian leadership, the Arab countries and the international community as a means to bridge the gap between the two sides on the issues of settlements, borders and security and to reaffirm the agreed terms of reference of the peace process in order to pave the way for direct negotiations.

Those talks, however, did not make tangible progress due to Israel's intransigence and refusal to comply with its legal obligations and the Road Map requirement to cease all settlement activities, including so-called natural growth. Those activities are illegitimate, are unquestionably a major obstacle to peace and are totally contradictory to the two-State solution and the core principle of land for peace.

We reiterate here that the cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is essential for the resumption of a credible process aimed at achieving the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. This is not a Palestinian condition for the peace process; it is a legal obligation incumbent upon Israel, the occupying Power, under the Fourth Geneva Convention, numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and the Quartet Road Map. It is also the unanimous position of the entire international community and has been an unwavering demand throughout the years if the peace process, before the process, and even during periods when it has been suspended.

In that regard, it is important to recall the special Security Council meeting on 26 September 2008, which specifically addressed the ever-present problem of illegal Israeli settlement activities and which was addressed by President Mahmoud Abbas, among other high-level officials (see S/PV.5983).

On the other hand, the Israeli conditions now being imposed on the Palestinian side are indeed arbitrary preconditions intended to exact further political gains for Israel based solely on the imbalance of power and impunity that it enjoys and that allow it to arrogantly make such demands while totally ignoring its own long-standing legal obligations and commitments. Such preconditions distort the reality on the ground, distract the focus of the debate from the core issues and have been used by Israel as a pretext to evade responsibilities in the peace process and to sabotage the process, revealing not only bad faith but total disrespect for the most fundamental principles of the process.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian leadership, with the support of the Arab Ministerial Committee, has heeded the international calls for resumption of direct negotiations, on the understanding that our participation would be on the basis of the Quartet statement of 20 August 2010. That statement reaffirmed the commitment to previous statements, including the 19 March 2010 statement, which, inter alia, called on Israel to abide by its obligation to freeze all settlement activities, including natural growth, and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001. The August statement expressed the "determination to support the parties throughout the negotiations, which can be completed within one year, and the implementation of an agreement".

Moreover, it was clear to everyone at the time that once direct negotiations commenced, the so-called Israeli moratorium on settlement activities would continue for the duration of negotiations or until the conclusion of a peace treaty.

On that point, I must be clear that, despite our very deep reservations about the moratorium — especially with regard to its partiality and non-extension to East Jerusalem, and which we continue to insist must

be a complete settlement freeze without exception — that gesture gave some credence to Israel's stated commitment to the two-State solution and could potentially help to create an environment more conducive to launching indirect and then direct negotiations.

Despite the adverse circumstances that prevailed, the resumption of direct negotiations in September was widely welcomed and once again raised hopes that the political impasse was about to be overcome and that, with serious efforts, a peaceful settlement could be achieved.

President Obama's statement before the General Assembly on 23 September 2010 (see A/65/PV.11) further clarified the commitment to the goal of realizing within one year an end to the 1967 Israeli occupation and the realization of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, as well as of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace on all tracks. The strong support of the international community for that goal was continually voiced by the majority of the world leaders who took the Assembly's rostrum. It seemed possible at that time that the momentum and hope generated would not be lost, despite the looming expiration of Israel's settlement moratorium.

Yet, regrettably, none of that was enough to compel Israel to extend its moratorium and comply with its obligation to freeze settlement activities to allow for an atmosphere truly conducive to the successful resolution of all final status issues, beginning with borders and security. Rather than acting in good faith and in a manner respectful of the circumstances and that would allow for the negotiations to be convened, the Israeli Government has chosen to blatantly disregard the global calls to cease its unlawful colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, persisting with its illegitimate policies and revealing its intention to continue pursuing its narrow, reckless expansionist agenda, at the expense of the prospects for peace and security.

Even a cursory review of the situation on the ground reflects the deplorable reality of the ongoing Israeli violations and crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Settlement construction and expansion continues, with new and provocative projects being undertaken daily by settlers and officials, who continue to gloat in the perpetration of the crime of confiscating and colonizing another people's land, further fuelling already high tensions and doubts regarding Israel's credibility as a peace partner.

Since January of this year alone, the Israeli settler population in the occupied Palestinian territory increased by 8,000. In addition, fanatic and extremist settlers continue to terrorize, harass and intimidate Palestinian civilians, including children, and to destroy and vandalize Palestinian properties. There has been yet another arson attack on a mosque, as well as ongoing attacks on Palestinian agricultural fields and orchards, with particular malice during this the olive-harvesting season.

These settlers are undoubtedly driven to persist in such acts of lawlessness and violence by Israeli religious and political leaders who continue to shamelessly provoke and incite them with inflammatory rhetoric, racist initiatives and hate-filled and offensive remarks, including from the rostrum of the General Assembly of this Organization.

The situation in occupied East Jerusalem remains most volatile, as Israeli settlers continue to act with aggression against the Palestinian residents of the city and continue to seize Palestinian properties. We have alerted the international community on numerous occasions to the extremely fragile situation in the Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Silwan, Al-Bustan, Sheikh Jarrah and others as a result of the constant encroachment by Israeli settlers in these areas, with official governmental support, as well as of the ongoing demolition of homes and eviction of Palestinian families. None of these illegal actions have ceased, even after the launch of direct peace negotiations.

At the same time, the situation in the Gaza Strip remains critical. In spite of Israel's declared intentions to ease its illegal, inhumane blockade, the occupying Power continues to obstruct the entry of essential goods into Gaza. Barely 25 per cent of needed goods and supplies are allowed to enter, and the obstruction of the entry of construction materials and supplies for industrial production continues, as does the prohibition on the export of Palestinian goods.

The reconstruction process thus continues to be severely hampered, including efforts by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other United Nations

agencies on the ground to reconstruct destroyed and damaged facilities and to build the schools necessary to accommodate Palestinian children in Gaza — 40,000 of whom were turned away at the start of the school year for lack of classroom space.

It is deplorable that in spite of the incessant calls for a full lifting of the blockade, Israel continues its defiance, and the humanitarian crisis, trauma and instability inflicted on the civilian Palestinian population by the Israeli blockade and military aggression persist unabated.

As stated at the outset, the situation is untenable, unsustainable and volatile and requires immediate redress. The most effective remedy is adherence to the law and pursuit of a peace settlement through an active, accelerated, good faith political process on the basis of the agreed terms of reference. Regrettably, at the moment, this option remains elusive.

Israel stands alone in rejecting the global call to honour its legal and moral obligations, as it continues to carry out illegal acts that are totally contradictory to those required for a peaceful settlement in accordance with the two-State solution, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders. Such actions — which have focused on altering the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, further fragmenting its contiguity, unity and integrity and imposing a fait accompli — are seriously, and perhaps permanently, threatening the viability of the two-State solution.

It is thus Israel that is responsible for the critical situation on the ground and for undermining peace negotiations, and it must be held accountable. The international community must act in unison to bring Israel into compliance with the global consensus to salvage the peace process. It is unacceptable for us to waver and change our legitimate position to accommodate Israel's intransigence and unlawful actions, permitting it to continue to shirk its legal obligations to the grave detriment of our collective future prospects for peace and security. Israel should be held accountable and held to the same legal standard as all countries in the world. The preferential treatment given it, which has fuelled its contempt and impunity over the decades, must stop.

The Palestinian leadership has consistently participated in the negotiations in good faith and, in spite of the many challenges, has repeatedly affirmed its willingness to engage in direct negotiations for peace. In addition to our constructive efforts in the political process, the Palestinian leadership, with strong international support, has simultaneously continued its efforts to ensure law, order and security and has been forging ahead with the implementation of the second year of the programme initiated by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to build the strong foundations and institutions of the Palestinian State in preparation for independence.

At the same time, the Palestinian leadership stands firm in its rejection of Israeli settlement activities. This position received unanimous Arab support at the recent summit in Sirte, Libya. The summit also decided that, in deference to the role being played by President Obama, an extended period of time should be given to allow the United States Administration to succeed in its efforts to compel Israel to cease its settlement campaign and to respect the very basis of the peace process. We remain supportive of President Obama's efforts, and our commitment to peace is clear, but we also remain insistent that settlement activities and the peace process cannot coexist and that one negates the other.

Now, it is time for Israel to decide. It must choose whether it wants peace and security for its people and with all of its neighbours, or whether it wants to remain an occupier, oppressor, human rights violator and aggressor State. The consensus position is obviously in favour of the first choice, and the readiness of the international community to support the parties in seizing the historic opportunity for peace is clear.

However, if Israel once again decides to defy the law and the will of the international community, choosing instead to listen to its extremists and settlers, then it should be made to bear the consequences that all other violators of the law are made to bear. The international community, including this Council, must act accordingly, following through with the long-overdue implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy and taking the necessary practical measures. It must put an end to the exceptional treatment that has been granted to Israel for decades now, which has permitted it to act as a State above the law and to make a mockery of the international community and of all efforts being exerted for a peaceful settlement.

The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict — is before us and has been for decades. Courageous, decisive decisions must be made, while recognizing that time is of the essence and that the decisions made at this critical juncture will determine not just the short term but the years ahead for our region.

I reaffirm today that, despite the grave difficulties before us on all fronts, the Palestinian leadership remains committed to peace and to engaging in a credible peace process on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map.

We continue to strive with full commitment towards the goal of a peaceful settlement of the conflict that will bring a complete end to the Israeli occupation of our land; that will allow the Palestinian people to realize their right to self-determination and to live in freedom and dignity in their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, side by side with Israel and all other neighbours in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders; and that will achieve a just and agreed solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of international law and United Nations resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Reuben (Israel): Allow me to commend you, Sir, for your able stewardship of the Security Council this month. In my first speech as Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, I appear before you today and state the profound and enduring wish of my nation to establish peace with the Palestinians: a peace based on security and mutual recognition; a peace that will ensure prosperity for our two peoples.

Peace can only be achieved through direct negotiations and compromise from both sides. Israel has continued to show that it is willing to take bold measures and make difficult decisions in pursuit of peace. To this end, Israel helped to encourage impressive growth in the Palestinian economy, removing hundreds of roadblocks and checkpoints in the West Bank. We took this action despite legitimate security concerns and continued terrorism. With a heavy heart, Israel put in place a self-imposed and unprecedented 10-month moratorium on settlement construction.

We are hopeful that the Palestinians will take the measures necessary for peace. After refusing to engage in direct negotiations for nine months during the moratorium, the Palestinians — who at first belittled the gesture — now demand its extension as a precondition for continuing talks. Settlements are one of many issues that need to be resolved in final status negotiations. History has shown that they do not stand in the way of making peace — as seen by peace agreements that were achieved with Egypt and Jordan. Furthermore, when Israel dismantled all of its settlements in the Gaza Strip, it received terrorism and rocket fire on towns and communities in return.

Israel welcomes the extremely important efforts of the United States Administration to promote peace and security in the region. In this regard, the United States is closely engaged with Israel and other parties to get direct talks back on track.

In looking for a way forward, we must build any future agreement on the principles of mutual recognition and security. A request that Israel recognize a Palestinian State as the nation-State of the Palestinian people must be met with an acknowledgement that Israel is the nation-State of the Jewish people. After generations of conflict, mutual recognition will be essential in overcoming a long history of incitement, combating terrorism and establishing peaceful coexistence between our two peoples. Any peace agreement must also clearly address Israel's security concerns with strong arrangements in that field.

The diverse and dangerous threats facing Israel remain significant. With support from the Iranian and Syrian regimes, extremist terrorist organizations in the region continue to rearm and stage attacks on Israeli civilians. The Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip remains an epicentre for terror and a launching ground for continuous rocket attacks against Israel. In Lebanon, the Hizbullah terrorist organization serves as a constant obstacle to peace and security for all in the region.

Establishing peace will require more than declarations or signatures on a piece of paper; it will necessitate concrete actions on the ground. With this in mind, the wider Arab world must also show Israelis and people around the globe that its declarations of peace will extend beyond words and will translate into deeds.

This body will discuss in detail the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in a few

weeks, but in advance of that discussion I would like to share a few thoughts about the continued challenges emanating from Lebanon, where radical forces continue to pose a threat to stability in the region. As we approach the upcoming report on resolution 1701 (2006), it remains clear that the Hizbullah terrorist organization continues to build up its military capabilities and armaments, acquiring sophisticated weaponry and missiles from its Iranian and Syrian patrons.

Hizbullah's deadly rearmament endangers Lebanon itself, as well as the wider Middle East. This terrorist organization continues to deploy weapons and build its military infrastructure throughout the civilian villages of southern Lebanon, adjacent to schools, hospitals, houses of worship and residential buildings.

Evidence of this phenomenon can be found in a series of explosions of Hizbullah weapons caches south of the Litani River over the past 15 months. The last such explosion took place in the Lebanese village of Shehabiyya on 3 September. Unfortunately, despite having real-time information about all of these incidents, the Lebanese Armed Forces did not intervene in a timely or robust manner. Furthermore, there is clear proof that Hizbullah removed evidence from all of those sites.

Hizbullah's provocations and continued rearmament must not go unanswered by this Council — which has repeatedly and clearly stipulated that this terrorist organization must disarm and disband — as they comprise a key issue addressed in resolution 1701 (2006).

We also call on the Syrian Government to refrain from engaging in actions that destabilize the region. While Syria claims to seek peace, it continues to support terror. There are numerous indications that the Syrian regime is hosting Hizbullah training camps within its territory, including locations where operatives receive training on missiles and other weapons. This reflects just the tip of the iceberg in terms of Syria's extensive support for terrorism in the region. If Syria genuinely wants to embrace the full spirit of peace, it must completely abandon its support for terror.

Let me turn to the greatest danger facing the Middle East and the world: Iran. The visit last week of Iran's President to Lebanon underscores the destabilizing impact of that extremist regime on our region. Iran's President is a leader who denies the Holocaust, promotes conspiracy theories about the 11 September terrorist attacks and calls for Israel to be wiped off the map; he only advances the causes of destruction and instability.

His regime's support provides a lifeline to the terrorist organizations of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizbullah, which could not exist without Iran. Relying on those proxies, Iran seeks to foil any movement toward rapprochement between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as other parties in the region. Thus, in searching for a durable agreement with the Palestinians we must also confront this threat with firm resolve.

I would like to note that, while Iran's President and his extremist allies seek to impose fear, bloodshed and *jihad* on the population of Lebanon, there are many other voices in the region. An open letter to President Ahmadinejad that was recently published in the Lebanese media offers an example of one such voice. Let me read to the Council a quote from this letter:

> ". . . you are attempting to interfere, just like others that came before you, in our affairs, where foreign interference was just to use Lebanon internally; the big slogans and the good intentions could not decorate or block the actual truth of this use."

Even more alarming than its continued support of terror is Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities. Such behaviour endangers not only our region or merely a specific group of countries. It endangers us all and must continue to be met by strong and effective action.

My comments today would not be complete without expressing our ongoing deep concern that for more than four years our kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit, has remained deprived of his most basic human rights, including any visit from the Red Cross. Israel expects the international community to do all in its power and more than has been done thus far, to bring about his swift release.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the

texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Anderson (United States of America): I thank you, Mr. President, and Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for your briefings today.

Last month, Israeli and Palestinian leaders took the momentous step of returning to direct talks. The core issues of this long-standing and tragic conflict will not be easily resolved. Direct talks are the path for the parties to reach a solution that resolves all issues, ends all claims and establishes a viable State of Palestine alongside a secure State of Israel as a key part of a comprehensive peace among Israel and all of its neighbours. The United States will continue to be a vigorous and steadfast partner in this vital effort. We are working closely with both sides to allow these negotiations to continue.

We were disappointed by the announcement of new tenders in East Jerusalem on 14 October, which was contrary to our efforts to resume negotiations. We have long urged both parties to avoid actions that could undermine trust, including in Jerusalem, and we will continue to do so as we work to make progress towards Middle East peace. Ultimately, however, forging a lasting and just peace will depend on leadership, vision and courage from the Israelis and the Palestinians.

As President Obama has noted, we have urged Israel to extend the settlement moratorium, which we believe makes sense as long as constructive talks are under way. As we continue to urge Prime Minister Netanyahu to institute another moratorium, we also urge President Abbas to resume negotiations, which remain the only way to resolve the conflict's most difficult issues and give the Palestinians the dignity of an independent State of their own.

We know that many obstacles lie ahead. We know that attempts to move towards lasting peace may be met by rejectionists and terrorism, but we must not let the forces of violence and despair determine whether Israeli and Palestinian children will live in peace or languish in conflict. We must press forward together towards our common goal of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, including a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. That goal is in the interests of Israelis, Palestinians, the United States and all those who seek to maintain international peace and security.

Those in the region who want a Palestinian State should do all they can to support the parties' efforts to bring about a just and lasting peace. And those around the world who seek an end to this bitter conflict should support these efforts and do nothing to undermine them.

Let me turn to the situation in Gaza. We continue to view the situation there with concern. Israel's announcement of 5 July was an important step towards improving the flow of goods and material into Gaza. That progress is continuing several months later, and we encourage the Government of Israel to take further steps to expand trade in both directions, consistent with its security needs. All those wishing to deliver goods should do so through the expanded, established channels to ensure that Israel's legitimate security needs are addressed even as the Palestinians' humanitarian needs are met.

Let me also draw attention to the Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, whom Hamas abducted in 2006 and who remains in captivity. We call again for his immediate release.

In its 1 June presidential statement on the flotilla incident (S/PRST/2010/9), the Council called for a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation conforming to international standards. We commend the Secretary-General's constructive initiative in convening a Panel of Inquiry that will receive and review the results of Israel's and Turkey's investigations. We welcome the spirit of cooperation that the Panel represents and continue to regard it as the primary and most appropriate method for the international community to review the incident.

Let me conclude by touching on the situation in Lebanon. The United States remains firmly committed to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, and therefore to the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). We continue to be gravely concerned by attempts by foreign players to undermine Lebanon's independence, endanger its stability and interfere with its sovereign affairs.

The continuing flow of weapons and war-fighting materiel across the Syrian border to Hizbullah is a reckless practice that risks plunging the region into open conflict. We urge the Council to remain vigilant

to these destabilizing trends, which threaten international peace and security and the lives of innocent civilians on both sides of the Blue Line.

Finally, let me turn to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. On 6 October, the Secretary-General rightly and unequivocally noted that the Tribunal is an independent body with a clear mandate from the Security Council to uncover the truth and end the era of impunity for political assassinations in Lebanon. The Tribunal is an independent judicial entity. Its work is a matter not of politics but of law. The Tribunal is fulfilling its independent judicial mandate under this Council's resolution 1757 (2007) at the request of the sovereign Government of Lebanon. We completely endorse the Secretary-General's statement that the Tribunal's efforts must go forward without interference. Efforts to discredit, hinder or delay the Tribunal's work should not be tolerated, and those who engage in them do not have the interest of Lebanon or justice at heart.

Mr. Moungara Moussotsi (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his substantial briefing on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Unfortunately, our discussion is taking place at a time when the direct talks relaunched on 1 September in Washington, D.C., between Palestinians and Israelis is once again at an impasse. Indeed, during the Council debate of 17 September (see S/PV.6388), we all unanimously welcomed the resumption of dialogue between the main parties concerned in order to find a negotiated solution ultimately leading to the creation of a Palestinian State. We believed then in the parties' commitment to overcoming their difficulties, which were numerous, and to pursuing uninterrupted talks until a peace agreement was signed. Unfortunately, we must recognize the fact that the peace process is once again deadlocked.

Regardless of the reasons, the impasse is no alternative to peace, and my delegation therefore urges both parties to resume their dialogue, which is a sine qua non for arriving at a final settlement of the long-standing conflict between them. We therefore invite them to arrive at a compromise on the remaining obstacles as soon as possible.

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis will find a lasting solution only in the context of comprehensive peace throughout the region. In that regard, we fully support the recommendation of the Secretary-General aimed at a comprehensive and negotiated settlement of the various crises prevailing in this region. We are convinced that the effective involvement of Syria and Lebanon in peace talks is absolutely essential for achieving the objective of comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

My delegation recalls the obligation to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States of the region, including Lebanon. We therefore call for an end to the persistent violations of Lebanon's airspace.

We cannot speak of Lebanon without renewing our full support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. We insist on the freedom of movement that it must enjoy throughout its area of operations so that it can effectively carry out the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council.

Recurrent violence in the region will not, unfortunately, promote the establishment of a climate of trust between the parties, without which neither dialogue, peace nor reconciliation is possible. The language of violence and hatred is the enemy of peace and brotherhood. We therefore invite the parties to refrain from engaging in actions likely to compromise the possibility of a lasting peace not only between the Palestinians and Israelis, but also, in particular, throughout that strategic region.

The pursuit of peace in the region necessarily involves relieving the suffering of the people of Gaza. In that regard, we must underscore once again the need for broad access to the crossing points to Gaza in order to supply the Palestinians with essential commodities and building materials. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the State of Israel's security is also an essential guarantee of peace in the region. Israeli security concerns must therefore be taken into account in the peace talks. It cannot be otherwise.

Destined to live together and to contribute to the flourishing of the Middle East, Israelis and Palestinians have no choice but to pursue the path of peace together. My delegation would therefore like to reiterate its support for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Araud (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. I also thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine and the Permanent Representative of Israel for their statements. France associates itself with the statement to be made by the head of the European Union delegation.

I would like to make four points.

First, it is important not to squander the opportunity created on 2 September in Washington, D.C., by the resumption of direct negotiations on the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel within secure and recognized borders. Relaunching the negotiations was a brave decision by the Palestinian and Israeli leaders, backed by the efforts of the United States and the Quartet under the sponsorship of Jordan and Egypt. The status quo will only lead to further instability and violence in the Middle East.

The direct negotiations are stymied by the issue of settlements. We have unceasingly reiterated that settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace. Every day, they compromise a little more the desired two-State solution. In that regard, they jeopardize Israel's security. Settlement, including in East Jerusalem, must stop.

In that regard, the settlement policy pursued in Palestinian neighbourhoods with the support of the Israeli authorities justifies this Council's concerns. Not only is it illegal, but it increases the specific threat of violent incidents in the holy city, with all conceivable political risks. That is why France, the European Union, the Quartet, the United States and the entire international community continue to advocate extending the moratorium.

However, we must transcend that impasse and not lose sight of the primary objective of an in-depth discussion of all final status issues. We welcome the fact that the Arab Peace Initiative follow-up committee has left the way open for a continuation of the process, but progress must urgently be made.

The international community must commit itself to assisting the negotiations. Naturally, France welcomes the United States efforts that have enabled that process to be relaunched, as well as the personal commitment of President Obama and the Secretary of State. However, in order to tackle the task of peace, so often relaunched in the region, and to finally achieve it, broader assistance to that process is vital because it would increase the essential trust between the parties and make it possible to better share the political risks that the choice of peace requires.

When he met President Abbas, President Sarkozy recalled that France was ready to work in that direction, together with the Quartet, whose role is essential, and the European Union, which, owing to its links to and involvement in the region, must also participate. The States of the region have a key role to play by showing their willingness, when the time comes, to turn the Arab Peace Initiative into concrete steps towards Israel. To that end, we are working to create conditions conducive to a resumption of Syrian-Israeli talks, in close cooperation with the United States and Turkey.

Secondly, changes must arise on the ground to create conditions conducive to the success of the negotiations. The Palestinian and Israeli populations must be able to see that improvements on the ground go hand in hand with the negotiations process, in particular with regard to freedom of movement and access and security.

All provocation must be avoided. We deplore the decision of the Israeli Government to launch calls for tender for the construction of 238 housing units in East Jerusalem. There can be no peace that excludes Jerusalem as the capital of both States, as the President of the French Republic said to the Knesset on 23 June 2008. In addition, the Palestinian Authority must continue its efforts to strengthen the security sector and establish the rule of law. The ongoing fight against terrorism must remain a priority.

With regard to Gaza, France continues to call for the immediate opening of crossing points to allow humanitarian access to the civilian population and the development of the economy. France welcomed Israel's adoption of measures to facilitate the entry of goods. Additional steps — such as an increase in the throughput of crossing points, the resumption of exports from Gaza, and relaxing conditions for individual freedom of movement to and from Gaza — are needed for economic activity to resume.

In addition to humanitarian and reconstruction issues, the blockade imposed on the population does not promote positive development of the political situation. Alongside those efforts, we continue to call for the unconditional and immediate release of Gilad

Shalit and for a halt to all violence, in particular the firing of rockets into southern Israel.

Thirdly, the international community's support for efforts of the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas to bolster the institutions of the future Palestinian State must continue. Israel must also resolutely assist that process, including in the West Bank. Token steps have been taken on the ground, but they remain insufficient, in particular concerning freedom of movement and access.

We reiterate our full support for the reforms implemented by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. We share the World Bank's assessment that "If the Palestinian Authority maintains its current performance... it is well positioned for the establishment of a State... in the near future".

In addition to the pledges made, which must be honoured, we have voiced our readiness to organize in Paris, in pursuit of the ongoing political process, a second donor conference for the Palestinian State, which would facilitate the support needed for the new plan to be submitted by the Palestinian Authority shortly.

Fourthly, we are also continuing our efforts in Lebanon. We call on all parties to implement resolution 1701 (2006) and to fully respect the Blue Line. We continue to provide our support to the Government of National Unity, headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, but we are concerned about the current tensions. In that regard, we regret the statements made by the President of Iran, calling into question the existence of a Member of the United Nations.

We also condemn efforts to undermine the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. We wish to recall that the Special Tribunal for Lebanon was established pursuant to resolution 1757 (2007) at the express request of the Lebanese Government. That resolution is binding on all. The creation of the Tribunal was a significant step forward in the fight against impunity. In the interests of Lebanon and the entire region, the Tribunal must be allowed to continue to work completely independently, as it currently does, and in peace. No one can or should prejudge the outcome of its work or attempt to exert any undue influence on it.

Sir Mark Lyall Grant (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing this morning.

Peace in the Middle East is a key priority for the United Kingdom. The launch of direct negotiations between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas more than a month ago was welcome progress towards achieving the outcome that we all want to see: a secure and universally recognized Israel living alongside a sovereign and viable Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States and a just settlement for refugees. We commend United States efforts to bring the parties to the negotiating table and the leadership shown by both sides in agreeing to direct talks after a long pause.

But the process has hit a serious obstacle. Negotiations are now on hold. If there is to be sustainable peace, both parties must do what is necessary to enable talks to resume. We are therefore disappointed that Israel failed to renew the settlement moratorium that expired on 26 September and that settlement activity has resumed throughout the occupied West Bank. The reported approval last week of a further 238 housing units in East Jerusalem is deeply concerning and will only further erode trust between the parties. Settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, is illegal. It undermines the viability of a Palestinian State and is damaging to the peace process.

We must be clear that meaningful reinstatement of the moratorium, which itself falls far short of Israel's legal obligations, is not an unreasonable expectation. It is essential to keep open the path to peace. Creating facts on the ground makes the necessary compromises harder to achieve. It destroys trust. In the end, it can close off the possibility of a deal entirely. We urge Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Government to demonstrate the leadership required to resolve this problem so that the parties can focus on the considerable challenges ahead. Doing so would inject some much-needed trust back into the process and create a fairer basis for negotiations. We have made this point to the Israeli Government at all levels.

The Palestinians must play their part, too. My Foreign Secretary spoke with President Abbas last week and was impressed by his resolve to return to direct negotiations under the right circumstances. We welcome the significant progress achieved by the Palestinians in recent years on security and institution-building — the foundations of a viable Palestinian State. This work must continue.

But there is also tough work to be done on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. A unified leadership is a crucial component of creating the conditions for a sustainable Palestinian State. Negotiations between the two leaders remain the best way of achieving the desired outcome. Alternative options, some of which were floated by the Arab League in its statement of 9 October, are less than ideal. But it is a fact that those options will receive increasing attention if compromises are not made to get the negotiations back on track, so again we urge both leaders to make those necessary compromises.

If peace is to succeed, it is imperative that there be progress on Gaza. We have been clear that the situation is unsustainable and counterproductive. Israel's decision in the summer to move from a list of permitted goods to a list of specific prohibited items has led to some improvement, but more needs to be done. The United Nations has said that at current rates of approval it would take 75 years to bring in what is required to implement the Gaza reconstruction plan of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. This is not good enough. All parties must now work together to deliver real change on the ground, including by allowing essential reconstruction to take place and supporting the development of the legal Gazan economy through exports.

Israel has legitimate security concerns, and we continue to call on Hamas to renounce all violence and take immediate and concrete steps towards the Quartet principles. The United Kingdom has long called for Gilad Shalit's immediate and unconditional release. It is also vital that Hamas allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit Shalit immediately. Shalit's continued captivity, without any Red Cross access, and with only very minimal contact with his family, is unacceptable.

Any solution must involve the entire region within a comprehensive peace, so we are concerned about increasing rhetoric aimed at undermining the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The Tribunal should be allowed to continue its work unimpeded. We strongly support the Secretary-General's unequivocal statement of 6 October reaffirming the Tribunal's independence and urging Lebanese and regional actors to avoid interfering with its work.

We continue to believe that a negotiated peace in the Middle East is achievable. The international community expects it. The people of Israel and Palestine deserve it. It is up to the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to make the compromises needed to deliver it.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East. We also listened carefully to the statements of the representatives of Israel and Palestine spelling out their views regarding the Middle East settlement.

We view the launch of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue as an important outcome of the joint efforts undertaken under the aegis of the Quartet of international mediators, with very active Russian participation. We wish to express our deep concern regarding the decision of the Israeli authorities not to extend the moratorium on construction activity and to resume construction in East Jerusalem. We believe that the resolution adopted on 9 October at the League of Arab States summit in Sirte will allow for continued contact with the aim of preserving direct talks between Israel and Palestine.

We again affirm our position, formulated in particular in the statements of the Middle East Quartet in Moscow on 19 March and in New York on 21 September, regarding the fact that Palestinians and Israelis should strive to find compromise solutions and refrain from unilateral steps that would prejudice the outcome of negotiations and are not recognized by the international community.

It is essential that the Palestinians and Israelis adopt a serious attitude and achieve compromise solutions on all aspects of final status, which will enable the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the well-known international legal bases: the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We understand that achieving this will not be easy. Differences of principle exist between Israelis and Palestinians regarding approaches to many issues on the agenda. Even though close United States involvement in the discussions is important, it is also necessary to provide collective assistance for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Particularly important in that respect is the mechanism for assisting the Arab-Israeli settlement embodied by the Quartet of international mediators, which is recognized by all interested parties, as well as the development of

cooperation between the Quartet and the League of Arab States Contact Group.

The situation in the region remains complex, with surges of tension around Gaza and activity by various extremist forces working to undermine the negotiations process. If a detailed, unbiased investigation is to be undertaken of the tragic events occurring around the freedom flotilla, it is important that an international commission under the aegis of the United Nations be set up and that Israel and Turkey agree to participate in it. We hope that the work of such a commission would promote a general improvement of the situation in the region and that its recommendations would prevent the recurrence of such dramatic events in the future.

One pressing issue still pending is that of Palestinian unity. Solutions should continue to be sought in order to achieve reconciliation. We support Egypt's efforts to that end and send a clear message to Hamas in that regard.

Our proposal to convene a conference on the Middle East in Moscow remains timely. It enjoys the well-known support of all interested parties. If direct and substantive political dialogue between the Palestinians and Israel becomes sustainable, it will create the conditions necessary for the preparation and holding of the conference — of course, following consultations with all interested parties.

In our view, the situation in Lebanon is radically different from that which prevailed in 2008. President Sleiman, the Government led by Mr. Hariri and the Lebanese Parliament have been able to create some stability and to ensure the effective operation of force structures and other State institutions. At the same time, the success that has been achieved needs to be bolstered. Against the backdrop of the complex regional situation, it is important for the Lebanese to pursue the processes of strengthening State institutions and domestic stability, which must continue without outside interference. Lebanon cannot be allowed to become the theatre of score-settling between external forces.

In that regard, we are concerned over attempts to entangle the issue of the future verdict of the Special Tribunal through leaks regarding accusations against individual Hizbullah officials. Our position concerning the Special Tribunal remains unchanged. We believe that the proceedings should be fair, unbiased and free of all politicization.

We welcome the positive momentum in relations between Lebanon and Syria. We view normal good-neighbourly relations between those countries, with which Russia has traditionally enjoyed relations of friendship, to be a substantial contribution to regional stability.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to commend Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing. We support the important role of the United Nations in the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East.

We have no doubt, Sir, that you share our view that the major feature of the situation in the Middle East is Israel's ongoing attempts to block the peace efforts led by the United States of America by continuing its illegal practices, notably settlement activity, the demolition of homes and the expulsion of their inhabitants, not to mention the collective punishment of the people of the Gaza Strip through the ongoing blockade. The efforts for peace I refer to are the same mentioned by President Obama before the General Assembly (see A/65/PV.11) when he promised the establishment of a Palestinian State within one year and expressed his hope that, when he returns to the Assembly Hall next year, the independent State of Palestine would be a new Member of the United Nations. He also called on Israel to extend its moratorium on settlement activities.

However, the Government of Israel continues to ignore not only the appeals of President Obama and the Quartet and the international consensus on the two-State solution and the Road Map, but also the dozens of resolutions of this Council and the General Assembly, not to mention the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The State of Israel has not only refused to extend the moratorium on settlement activity in the West Bank — which did not include East Jerusalem — and pursued such activity uninterrupted over the past 10 years, but it has amended its citizenship law, making it a condition for anyone seeking Israeli nationality to take an oath of allegiance to the State of Israel as a Jewish State.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel has sought to pre-empt the results of the negotiations by setting as his principal objective the establishment of arrangements to guarantee Israel's security by ensuring the presence of the Israeli army on the borders between the West Bank and Jordan and by recognizing

Israel as the Jewish State. Indeed, the amendments to the Israeli law of citizenship and the call on Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish State are but two faces of the same coin and are not only aimed at eroding the right of return of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, but also threaten the very presence of Palestinians in Israel itself by denying their legitimate historical presence in the land of their forefathers. It dresses up the idea of transfer or deportation as Fascism in new robes, as has been noted in the Israeli media by the most prominent Israel writers.

This is exactly what Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman meant when he said that we must place the problem of the Arabs of Israel on the negotiating table, for there can be no lasting, genuine and solid solution based on a homogeneous Palestinian State without a Jewish presence at a time when Israel is being asked to be a bi-national State. From the rostrum of the General Assembly, Mr. Lieberman said that the negotiations should be based on the exchange of land and population and not on land for peace. He believes that there is no possibility of achieving peace next year or in the next generation and that the only solution is a phased, long-term solution. He thus calls for emphasis on the problems of security and the economy.

In fact, what Lieberman calls economic security and phased peace are pure illusions. Economic security cannot be achieved or sustained in isolation from the political situation. He seeks to delude the international community into believing that the Palestinian economy in the West Bank is growing and that the Palestinians are achieving prosperity under Israeli occupation. None of this is true, for that economy is based largely on assistance from donors, as many representatives around this table well know. The call for phased peace, at a time when settlement activities in the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza continue, will achieve the contrary of peace because it erodes the basis of peace and the two-State solution.

In any case, we cannot imagine peace in any form, shape or context so long as Israel continues to blockade the Gaza Strip and occasionally to bombard it and kill its people under the pretext of fighting terrorism. As a matter of fact, Israel is imposing not only an external blockade of Gaza, but an internal one as well. The most recent report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, issued in August, notes that Israel bans the Palestinians from using or entering 17 per cent of the land in the Strip, including 35 per cent of its arable land. It also prohibits fishing in 85 per cent of Palestinian territorial waters, contrary to the Oslo Accords.

With regard to Gaza, we emphasize the importance of promptly dispatching the fact-finding mission established by the Secretary-General to investigate — in an impartial, credible and transparent manner and in accordance with international criteria — the attack by the Israeli occupying forces and navy on the freedom flotilla. Such an investigation would allow us to assign responsibility, punish the perpetrators, and compensate all the victims. In this context, we hope that the Council will consider all consequent reports of the fact-finding mission.

Faced with that intransigence and Israel's logic of might, we emphasize that we are committed to the force of the law and that we seek a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference for peace, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. In that context, negotiations in whatever form must deal with the final status issues mentioned in the terms of reference cited. The Road Map calls for a total moratorium on settlement activities within specified, short time frames. That was emphasized by the Quartet on 20 August.

Permanent peace is a peace that includes Syria and Lebanon and is predicated on a withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights to the borders of 4 June 1967 and what is remaining of Lebanese territories, in accordance with the resolutions of the Council, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). In that respect we avail ourselves of this opportunity to re-emphasize Lebanon's commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) in all its aspects. Israel must do that also.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): Let me at the outset thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his useful briefing.

Last month, the international community overwhelmingly welcomed the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Cautious optimism was in the air. There was even talk of reaching a settlement within one year. However, it unfortunately did not take long for the skeptics to be proven right once again. Despite appeals from all quarters of the international community, Israel let the moratorium on settlement activity expire.

For our part, we still believe that this last round of direct talks can be salvaged. Turkey welcomes the decision by the Palestinian side to not withdraw completely from the process and to give ongoing efforts to find common ground some more time. That being said, this pause in direct engagement cannot last forever.

Once again, Turkey, like scores of other States, calls on Israel to desist from taking unilateral steps and employing politically expedient rhetoric that undermine and prejudice the notion of a negotiated two-State settlement. That means first and foremost immediately freezing all settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, with a view to giving direct negotiations a chance to proceed.

For there to be popular support for direct negotiations and ultimately the realization of a two-State solution, the conditions of occupation have to be eased and a positive environment created on the ground that allows for the State-building exercise in Palestine to make progress. If the Palestinian Authority is indeed Israel's partner in peace, then it must be empowered to assume its responsibilities fully.

We welcome the World Bank's recent pronouncement that at its current pace and performance, the Palestinian Authority is well positioned for the establishment of a State at any point in the near future. For the Palestinian Authority to become economically viable, obstacles to private sector development and sustainable growth have to be lifted. Palestinians need to be able to use more of their land. They also have to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. In short, as the base for a State is rolled out, the measure of occupation must be rolled back. In the meantime, the international community must continue to support the considerable progress already made by the Palestinian Authority in State-building.

On the other hand, according to all accounts, the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to be grave. By virtue of its illegal and inhuman blockade, Israel is directly responsible for an ongoing human tragedy that is unfolding day in and day out, in plain sight. It is a harsh existence where, for example, teenagers collecting rubble to make cement are shot at on a daily basis. Such is the sad reality designed and imposed by Israel.

The international community must react proactively to the suffering that endures in Gaza. Turkey once again calls for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and for the full and immediate lifting of the blockade.

On a positive note, Turkey welcomes the recent progress made in talks between Palestinian factions. The existing differences need to be overcome, and disunity must be made a thing of the past. We will continue to support efforts at reconciliation. The Palestinian people need and deserve a single leadership that incorporates all factions and is able to lend its full support to the peace process.

The stability of Lebanon continues to be of paramount importance for peace and security in the region. Tensions have visibly mounted over the past few weeks. It is crucial that all of the actors in the political spectrum in Lebanon remain calm, maintain dialogue and be sensitive to all legitimate concerns. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon is an independent body established by the Council at the request of Lebanon. Its work should not become politicized.

Turkey believes that the hard-won peace in Lebanon must be preserved at all costs, and we will continue to play our part in a bilateral and regional context to defuse existing tensions. In this context, let me also reiterate our full support for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. Turkey will continue to call for and strive towards the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

As concerns the attack by Israeli military forces on an international humanitarian aid convoy on the high seas, Turkey welcomes the fact that, based on the Council's presidential statement on 1 June (S/PRST/2010/9), the work of the panel of inquiry established by the Secretary-General is under way. In mid-September the panel produced its first progress report, after receiving an interim report on the Turkish national investigation. The panel awaits a similar national contribution from Israel to proceed with the inquiry.

On the other hand, the fact-finding mission dispatched by the United Nations Human Rights Council submitted its report, which that Council adopted by on 29 September (*See A/HRC/RES/15/1*). I will not go into the details of that important report here. In short, the mission concluded, based on a very detailed analysis of the facts, that a series of violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, were committed by

the Israeli forces during the interception of the flotilla and the detention of passengers in Israel prior to their deportation. Turkey continues to support the work of the panel of inquiry and looks forward to the establishment by the panel, as soon as possible, of all the facts and circumstances surrounding that tragic use of force against civilians in international waters.

There are once again serious question marks about the future of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. At this time of uncertainty, all parties must exercise restraint and refrain from taking steps that are counterproductive to the efforts to establish common ground and a basis for compromise. In that context, the major new settlement activity in East Jerusalem, announced just last Friday, is yet another step in the wrong direction. Israel must put an end to the actions designed to change the demographics and the social and religious fabric of Jerusalem. It must refrain from any provocative action in the city and preserve the status of Jerusalem, as required by the relevant Security Council resolutions.

More broadly, peace in the Middle East cannot be attained without putting in place a comprehensive framework that takes into account all the different tracks. We call on all actors in the region to act responsibly, assume their fair share of the burden in the search for stability, and give peace a chance.

Mr. Li Baodong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing. I have also listened attentively to the statements made by the representatives of Palestine and Israel.

Currently, the situation in the Middle East continues to be complicated and volatile. The international community should continue to work to create conditions conducive to resolving tensions between the parties concerned and achieving lasting peace. On the Middle East question and the issue of achieving lasting peace in the region, China has always maintained that differences should be settled through negotiation and dialogue between the parties concerned.

China supports the early establishment of an independent State of Palestine living in peace with Israel, arrived at through political negotiations between Palestine and Israel. The direct negotiations that began in early September represent an important opportunity for the peace process in the Middle East. China hopes that the negotiations will continue and will yield substantive progress at an early date.

Currently, those negotiations have been brought to a standstill by the issue of settlements. China is profoundly concerned about this. The direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine did not come about easily. China hopes that Israel will be able to see the big picture and extend the freeze on the construction of settlements, so as to create the necessary conditions for the continuation of negotiations. We call upon Israel to immediately and completely freeze the construction of settlements and of the separation wall on occupied Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

The humanitarian situation in occupied Palestinian territory, and in particular in the Gaza Strip, continues to be grave. That situation should not be allowed to continue. We welcome the recent Israeli easing of restrictions on the access of some assistance in the form of humanitarian goods and commodities to the Gaza Strip. However, it is not enough to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. China calls upon Israel to immediately and completely lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip and to once again allow the people there the space necessary for a normal and dignified existence, life and development. We call upon the international community to pay continuing attention to the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and to provide greater support to its people.

China firmly supports the just cause of the Palestinian people to achieve their legitimate national rights. We hope that all factions in Palestine will settle their differences and achieve reconciliation through dialogue and consultation at an early date, so that they can work together for the long-term interests of the nation by achieving independent Statehood, whereby the Palestinian people can enjoy peace and stability.

On 13 and 14 October, Mr. Wu Sike, China's Special Envoy on the Middle East issue, visited Israel and Palestine. China is ready to work actively and constructively on the peace process in the Middle East. China has taken note of the efforts made by the Quartet on the question of the Middle East. However, the Quartet cannot replace the role of the Security Council in promoting the Middle East peace process. The Security Council should assume its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security with regard to the Middle East issue.

China supports the two-State solution, with Palestine and Israel living in peace with one another, as well as the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the principle of land for peace and the Road Map.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): Let me first join others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Ambassador Meron Reuben and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their important contributions to our discussion here today.

Austria aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the delegation of the European Union on behalf of the Union.

One of the strongest messages from world leaders at last month's General Assembly debate was the appeal to the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian people to be courageous and move ahead with direct talks. As Austrian Foreign Minister Michael Spindelegger underlined in his address in the framework of the general debate and in his meetings with Middle East leaders on that occasion, those talks offer the first concrete prospects for sustainable peace in the Middle East in many years. An agreement between Israel and the Palestinians would radically improve the lives of the peoples concerned and provide the key to a more stable region.

With the expiration of the partial moratorium on settlement construction, we again face the risk of sliding back into a stalemate that would only profit demagogues and violent spoilers. We therefore call on the Government of Israel to urgently reconsider its position. At the same time, we reiterate our call on Israel to bring all settlement activities to an effective halt, including in East Jerusalem. In that context, we specifically call for a halt to the implementation of recent decisions with regard to the construction of additional housing units in Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev.

We call on both sides to realize their enormous responsibilities towards their peoples and the wider international community, and to continue to work towards a negotiated settlement. The absence of peace for yet another generation is neither a viable nor an acceptable alternative for either side. We urge Israeli and Palestinian leaders to look beyond the political expediency of the day and carve out an environment in which all core issues can be tackled and resolved successfully.

We call on both sides to observe calm and restraint in words and deeds and to demonstrate their adherence to the obligations they agreed to under the Road Map. Both sides should take visible and tangible steps to nurture confidence in the renewed peace efforts. We strongly encourage both sides to capitalize on the positive developments that their cooperation has yielded in recent months, including in the area of security and economic growth. In particular, decisive progress in the expansion of freedom of movement and access in the West Bank and the acceleration of the recovery of Gaza would contribute to building trust in the belief that there is an alternative future of peace and security for the State of Israel and the future State of Palestine, living side by side in peace as neighbours.

It is important that the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to build functioning institutions for a future Palestinian State move forward dynamically. We call on Palestinian political representatives to seriously pursue reconciliation efforts and to agree on a political platform based on non-violence and the quest for peace, democracy and the rule of law. The current split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip jeopardizes prospects for the successful implementation of the two-State solution.

With regard to the investigation of the tragic flotilla incident, we support the ongoing efforts of the Panel of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General. We look forward to the continued cooperation of the parties with the Panel.

With regard to Lebanon, we reiterate our call on all parties to abide by their obligations under resolution 1701 (2006). While awaiting the results of the investigation into the incident of 3 September in Shehabiya, we wish to underscore the importance of decisive efforts by all parties to ensure that the area south of the Litani River is kept free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons.

Austria is deeply committed to promoting the rule of law, as this is also a prerequisite for sustainable peace and development. Preventing impunity for past crimes is an essential contribution to strengthening democracy and the rule of law. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, like other international criminal courts and tribunals, is an important instrument to fight

impunity. We firmly believe that respect for its independence is essential for fulfilling its mandates, and we thus fully support the statement by the Secretary-General on 6 October.

In closing, let me reiterate the deep commitment of Austria, in cooperation with her European Union partners, to supporting and ensuring the success of direct negotiations and to opening all tracks for a comprehensive regional peace. Let me add that we also hope for the continued support of our Arab partners in this important endeavour.

Mr. Barbalić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his update on recent developments in the Middle East. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Israel, Mr. Meron Reuben, and the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Mr. Riyad Mansour, for their presence and their contribution to our debate.

In the past month, we have all witnessed the intensified efforts to find a way to continue direct peace talks in an environment conducive to progress. During the Security Council discussions last month, Bosnia and Herzegovina whole-heartedly welcomed the resumption of direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians. We would also like to use this opportunity to reiterate our full support for serious and responsible direct negotiations, which represent the only way to resolve all final status issues and reach a two-State solution.

The resumption of direct talks represents a major breakthrough in the Middle East crisis and a significant achievement by the parties involved. It has also been strongly supported by many international actors, and we must again pay tribute to United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator George Mitchell, who have played an important role, which reflects President Obama's commitment to peace in the Middle East. The Middle East Quartet and the Arab League have also contributed substantially to this process.

My delegation was aware of the tremendous efforts required from both sides in order to get the negotiation process moving. Unfortunately, we are once again confronted with discouraging news from the Middle East. Bosnia and Herzegovina shares the grave concerns of others regarding actions that threaten the continuation of direct talks, in particular the expiration of Israel's 10-month partial settlement moratorium. We must underline once again that all settlement activities on occupied land are illegal under international law and are contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map. Those activities, therefore, represent an obstacle on the road to comprehensive peace. Bosnia and Herzegovina calls upon Israel to respond positively to appeals by the international community and end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem.

Still, despite this major obstacle on the road to negotiations, it is our strong belief that their resumption is a crucially important opportunity that must not be missed. The Middle East can not afford a failed peace process. Bosnia and Herzegovina, therefore, urges the parties directly involved to take the difficult and necessary decisions to achieve a just political settlement that should lead to a two-State solution. We would like to underline that we firmly believe that this momentum deserves the continuous and unconditional support of the entire international community, and we are looking forward to a comprehensive political dialogue with a clear agenda and terms of reference aimed at resolving all permanent status issues — including the status of Jerusalem — within one year.

With that in mind, it is important to reiterate that the current situation calls for brave political decisions and practical steps from both sides. It is also of utmost importance that both sides avoid provocative actions that could undermine the success of the negotiations. Furthermore, respect for international humanitarian law by all is vital for any lasting solution and cooperation between the two sides.

We strongly condemn all armed attacks on civilians and wish to reiterate that Israeli and Palestinian civilian populations must be protected. Bosnia and Herzegovina calls for a complete stop to all violence, in particular rocket fire and terrorist attacks.

Bosnia and Herzegovina advocates a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, which can be achieved only on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map and agreements previously reached by the parties, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative. Bosnia and Herzegovina is and will remain committed to the two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The continuation and worsening of the situation in Gaza is of continuing concern to Bosnia and Herzegovina. We recognize positive Israeli activities towards easing the entry of goods into Gaza, but reiterate our calls for a full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, including goods from the West Bank.

Allow me to reiterate our firm belief that only direct, open and frank negotiations can advance the peace process and bring it to a successful conclusion. Bosnia and Herzegovina urges the Israelis and the Palestinians to invest all their efforts to achieve a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace.

In conclusion, Bosnia and Herzegovina recalls that peace in the Middle East should be comprehensive and reiterates the importance of negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. As regards Lebanon, we reaffirm our full support to the Lebanese authorities and commend the crucial role in southern Lebanon of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). We call upon all parties concerned to implement all provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), to respect the Blue Line in its entirety and to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL. Bosnia and Herzegovina fully supports the work and the independence of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

Mrs. Ogwu (Nigeria): I would also like to extend appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his very lucid briefing on the situation in the Middle East. I would like to limit my comments to three issues, namely, political developments, security and humanitarian assistance.

On the subject of political developments, we believe that last month the Security Council lauded the resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians, facilitated by the United States and the Quartet. Although the resumption of talks was greeted with a great sense of relief and hope, no one was under the illusion that moving the peace process forward would be easy. Mindful of the enormity of the task ahead, we emphasized the need for compromise and flexibility by the parties to pave the way for the achievement of desired results.

It is disheartening to note that in the weeks following the resumption of the talks difficulties have arisen, resulting in a stalemate. Indeed, many had hoped that Israel would heed the appeals for the extension of the 10-month freeze on housing construction in the West Bank Jewish settlements as a positive confidence-building measure. Instead, the Israeli Government's approval of 238 new homes in East Jerusalem announced last Friday will not only enflame passions on the Palestinian side. The decision could also be interpreted as a move to kill the direct talks and thereby complicate the peace process. Coming at a time when the Palestinian Authority has accepted the compromise of a two-month extension on the moratorium, the announcement would have profound impact on the United States-backed negotiations with the Palestinian Authority.

Against that background, the Council, the Quartet, the Arab League and bilateral partners should sustain the pressure on the parties to remain engaged through dialogue. They should also be encouraged to remove all impediments to a negotiated settlement that would result in a two-State solution and agreement on all final status issues within two years.

The parties themselves must increase their efforts in both words and deeds to create the conditions conducive to a lasting peace. Provocative action on either side at this delicate juncture does not serve the interest of peace. We therefore urge Israel to rescind the decision to construct new homes in Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev.

With regard to security, we believe that the volatile situation in the region remains a matter of deep concern. The series of attacks in August and September that led to the death and injury of several Israelis, including two pregnant women, are deplorable. It is indeed regrettable that a group of Hamas militants initiated some of the attacks in order to disrupt the peace talks.

Reports that Hamas and Hizbullah continue to threaten the peace talks are indeed troubling. There is no justification for actions by either of the parties that contradict the rules of engagement and international war conventions. Soldiers and combatants alike must be held to the highest professional standards. We thus welcome the recent ruling by an Israeli court that found two Israeli soldiers guilty of reckless endangerment and of improper conduct. The use of children or civilians as human shields should not be condoned in any situation.

We hope that Israel's announcement of indirect talks with Hamas leaders on prisoner swap will help to ease the tensions.

While we welcome the marginal increase in the amount of goods and materials allowed to enter the Gaza Strip, we wish to reiterate the need for the complete removal of the blockade by the Israeli Government. The unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza would facilitate the Palestinian state-building process. It would also reduce tensions and the threat to Israel's security. Indeed, the determination by aid vessels to break the blockade — most recently by the aid vessel *Irene* — would be unnecessary were the blockade on Gaza to be completely lifted. Until that goal is achieved, we call on all aid vessels to avail themselves of the legitimate crossings provided for persons, goods and materials into the Gaza Strip to avoid unpleasant consequences.

Nigeria believes that for the negotiations to have a successful outcome, there must be mutual trust and confidence between the parties. The parties must also abide by and recommit to their Road Map obligations. We call for the increased commitment and involvement in the peace efforts from regional partners to help secure the process. We welcome the support of the Arab League for the peace process and its decision to engage in discussions on the way forward.

The time is indeed ripe for a comprehensive and holistic discussion of the decades of crisis in the region, including the Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon conflicts.

Mr. Nishida (Japan): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing. I would also like to thank Ambassador Mansour and Ambassador Reuben for their respective statements.

As we have repeatedly stated, the only way to achieve durable peace in the Middle East is through sincere negotiations in good faith between the parties concerned. We strongly encourage both parties to resume the direct negotiations that started at the beginning of September. We support the United States effort to resume the negotiations and achieve a negotiated settlement.

Japan is disappointed that the Israeli moratorium on settlement activities was not extended and that Israel approved bidding for construction of housing units in East Jerusalem. Japan urges Israel not to implement this new construction plan and to extend the moratorium on settlement activities.

Both parties must carry out their obligations and commitments under the Road Map. We reiterate our call on the Israeli Government to freeze all settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. No actions should be taken that could prejudge the final status negotiations. At the same time, we call upon the Palestinian Authority to continue its efforts to improve security and fulfil its commitment to cease violence and work against incitement.

The negotiations should achieve a two-State solution by ending the occupation of those territories, including East Jerusalem, occupied since 1967. Japan supports the plan of the Palestinian Authority to build a Palestinian State within 24 months. Japan will continue to extend assistance and help build capacity for the Palestinian people and institutions for the Palestinian State. I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for mentioning our "corridor for peace and prosperity" project, which we are actively pursuing.

With regard to Gaza, we continue to call for the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). We also call for Palestinian reconciliation and support the efforts of Egypt in that regard.

With regard to Lebanon, we reaffirm our support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon and the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. We are alarmed by some of the statements made in Lebanon about the present situation, and we call on all parties to act responsibly. We strongly support the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) and maintaining calm in its area of operation.

We also firmly support the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which is an independent and international judicial entity. The Tribunal should continue to carry out its mandate without any interference; that will contribute to ending impunity.

Japan will continue to make every effort to help the parties achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): I too would like to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco his comprehensive

briefing, as well as the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their remarks.

Once again, the Middle East peace process is at a very delicate juncture. The end of the construction freeze on Israeli settlements in the West Bank, continued construction of Israeli homes in East Jerusalem, the attacks on and by Israeli settlers and the increased exchange of fire between Gaza and Israel are all ominous developments that pose a real challenge to the direct negotiations.

Those disturbing developments must be reversed so that the negotiation process launched on 2 September can continue. That will require political courage and statesmanship. It means halting all settlement activity, as it becomes untenable for the Palestinian leadership to gather support for the talks while the very prospects of a viable Palestinian State continue to be undermined by construction. Freezing construction is not only a legal obligation, but is actually the single most critical contribution to peace in the region at this juncture.

We all understand that domestic political constraints are a factor in any significant diplomatic endeavour and, in cases of war and peace, even a determining one.

At the same time, leaders and parties must look beyond their immediate political objectives and take the measures that are necessary to preserve the peace process and to reach their long-term goals. The commitment of all parties to peace will be judged not by words, but by deeds. One is not asking Israel to make concessions. Israel is being asked to fulfil its legal obligation not to build in the occupied territories and, in so doing, to allow for the negotiations to have a reasonable chance to succeed.

Saving the incipient direct negotiations will also require the active engagement of the international community. We commend the efforts of the United States Administration in that regard. We also applaud the decision taken by the Follow-up Committee of the League of Arab States in Sirte to support the Palestinian Authority in giving some time for conditions to be created for the resumption of negotiations.

Despite the many challenges they face today and will certainly face in the future, negotiations are the only way to achieve sustainable peace, provided they are fair, meaningful and achieve concrete results in the timeframe announced in September. Negotiations for the sake of negotiations do not serve the purpose of peace; rather, they endanger it.

Stopping and preventing violence is also key to sustaining the fragile peace process. Recent incidents of provocation and intolerance are a matter for serious concern. We condemn the attacks against Israeli settlers and the rocket-firing into southern Israel from Gaza. We equally condemn provocation and violence from Israeli settlers and the unacceptable attacks on mosques and on Palestinian civilians and property. Perpetrators of such acts must be swiftly brought to justice. Moving the peace process forward is the most unambiguous response to those who resort to incitement and violence to impose their will, discourage dialogue and undermine the two-State solution.

The ultimate success of the peace process will also depend on intra-Palestinian reconciliation. We welcome the recent developments in the Palestinian talks in Damascus and the constructive role played by Egypt. Positive signs in the right direction are most needed as the effort of institutional capacity-building in Palestine, following Prime Minister Fayyad's plan, reaches a new phase. We reiterate the need for Israel to contribute to that effort by further eliminating restrictive measures.

The rightful focus on direct negotiations must not divert attention from the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. On the contrary, apart from inflicting unlawful hardship upon 1.5 million people, the blockade of Gaza is also detrimental to the peace talks and inconsistent with a true desire to create an environment conducive to substantive dialogue. We welcome the easing of the Israeli blockade, but what is required is a complete lifting of the blockade, without prejudice to Israel's legitimate security concerns.

At this critical point in time, there are fundamental choices to be made by the parties, in particular by the strongest one. As the Secretary-General recently and eloquently stated, if the door to peace closes, it will be very hard to reopen. We hope and expect that his important message will be understood and heeded.

Before I conclude, let me add a few words on Lebanon. We encourage all Lebanese to work together towards political stability and prosperity. We urge all

parties to address their differences peacefully. The international community should also continue to extend its full support to the country, especially through efforts to assist Lebanon in promoting justice while consolidating peace and reconciliation.

Mr. Heller (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for the briefing he has given us, as well as the representatives of Israel and the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine for their statements.

For decades, the international community has witnessed wars, tension and violence in the Middle East, quite often without having the capacity to respond, hoping that some day the conflict would finally end and give way to peaceful coexistence between those nations. At present, no efforts are being spared to achieve that goal. The United Nations and various States, both from within and outside the region, have been resolutely involved in this complex task.

The situation is quite different from that which prevailed 60 years ago. Peace agreements have been signed, the existence of the State of Israel has been recognized by the vast majority of the international community and dialogue has been established between the main parties involved, namely, Israelis and Palestinians. On occasion, that dialogue has substantive; at times, it has been a dialogue of the deaf.

However, the conflict persists, and we have not achieved the objective that would make it possible to resolve the conflict once and for all, that is, the creation of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State that is politically and economically viable and living in peace side by side with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

At the beginning of September, thanks to the efforts of President Obama's Administration, hopes for peace were once again rekindled owing to the restoration of direct dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, supported by the Quartet, the Arab League and the international community. The goal is ambitious: to resolve all the central issues within a year. All the relevant stakeholders have become involved in that task, with the firm goal of giving shape to the so-called two-State solution. They all knew that there would obstacles, threats and risks, but were determined to become involved in the process sincerely and seriously.

Today, ongoing dialogue hangs from a thread, and the process of rapprochement seems to be slipping backwards. This situation is not acceptable. Dialogue and negotiation must continue and must produce tangible results for the Palestinians and the Israelis. The status quo is not a viable alternative. It will only exacerbate tensions and lead to greater violence and confrontation, directly affecting the civilian population and destabilizing the region.

The international community also has a role to play in restoring substantive and direct dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, not only because the alternative to dialogue is more violence, but because we truly believe in the need for the Palestinian people to have a sovereign and independent State. This was established by the Quartet in its statement of 19 March and in subsequent statements, and it has been recognized by the vast majority of Member States of the Organization.

But perhaps the most decisive factor will be when both parties abstain from carrying out provocative acts or acts that run counter to their obligations under the Road Map. Israel and the Palestinian Authority must create a context that is conducive to negotiations. In that regard, the resumption of construction in illegal settlements in the West Bank and the announcement of new construction in East Jerusalem are a serious step backwards. The international community has been unanimous on this point: settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal, run counter to international law and are a serious obstacle to the peace process, as they prejudge and alter the results of the negotiations.

Contrary to what some think, settlements do not provide for greater security. On the contrary, they generate tension, resentment and violence between the two peoples, as we have seen in the past few weeks and over the years. We urge Israel to cease this practice once and for all, including the so-called natural growth. This would confirm its commitment to the peace process.

The Palestinian Authority must also continue to meet its commitments under the Road Map. Despite the tragic attacks against Israeli civilians, which we have firmly condemned, we have noted with satisfaction the improved capacities of Palestinian security forces, as well as a gradual improvement in the economic situation of the West Bank.

We cannot think about improving the living conditions of the Palestinians without considering the civilian population in Gaza. The blockade imposed on Gaza is unsustainable and counter-productive and has severe humanitarian consequences for the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. The partial lifting of restrictions is welcome, but it is insufficient. The blockade must be completely lifted, and, as we have continued to state since January 2009 and taking account of the legitimate security concerns of Israel, we believe that this will only be possible if an international monitoring mechanism is set up which will guarantee a lasting ceasefire, the complete openness of border crossings and control of illicit weapons trafficking to Gaza, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). This will also lead to a significant reduction in tension and deaths resulting from this situation, such as the attack on the Freedom flotilla on 31 May.

We trust that the Panel of Inquiry established by the Secretary-General will clarify the events that took place during that incident, and we reiterate the primacy of international norms. An investigation must be carried out, as stated in the Council's presidential statement (S/PRST/2010/9), and it must be prompt, impartial, credible and transparent. We await the early outcome of the investigations under way. It is also essential that inter-Palestinian dialogue continue, as facilitated by Egypt and other States involved.

Assessing the situation in the Middle East requires that we take into account the regional situation. We have noted with concern an increase in inter-community tensions in Lebanon, which endangers the political balance and coexistence among the various factions within Lebanese political society and has led to ongoing violations of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), in particular through the caching of weapons and explosives in the areas of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, as well as daily incursions by Israeli armed forces into Lebanon's territory. We appeal both to Israel and to Lebanon, as well as to other relevant political stakeholders, to comply with the provisions of Security Council resolutions and to avoid any belligerent rhetoric that could lead to an escalation in violence.

Moreover, the work of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon has generated increased tension and controversy in the region. As pointed out by the Secretary-General on 6 October, the Tribunal is an independent body with a clear Security Council mandate to end impunity in an extremely serious case. Its conclusions must not be prejudged, and there must be no interference with its work.

The time has come for the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to take important but difficult political decisions to benefit their own people as well as to ensure international peace and stability. The situation requires political will, which has been lacking so far.

We appeal to Israel and to the Palestinian Authority to demonstrate through tangible actions, their determination to resolve this conflict in a way that goes beyond provocation and short-term political interests.

The President: In view of the lateness of the hour, Uganda will be the last speaker of the morning. I propose to resume the meeting at 3 p.m. this afternoon in order to listen to the other speakers on the list.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Uganda.

I thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank the representatives of Israel and Palestine for their statements.

It is a matter of concern to my delegation that the situation in the Middle East remains tense and fragile. We were encouraged by the commencement of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine last month. It is essential that the two parties uphold their commitment to work towards a framework for permanent peace.

There is no doubt that this negotiation process will require courageous decisions and concessions by both parties. Uganda is convinced that a comprehensive and durable peace lies in a two-State solution: Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. In this regard, we commend the efforts undertaken by the international and regional partners in facilitating the negotiations.

We salute the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to fulfil their obligations under the Road Map, particularly in the security sector, in institution-building and in economic development. We, however, remain concerned about divisions among the

Palestinians and call upon them to resolve their differences through dialogue.

The continued settlement activity by Israel in East Jerusalem is a recipe for conflict, which is a matter of serious concern. We call upon Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth. We are also concerned over the continued rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel, as well as Israeli air strikes into Gaza. We call on both sides to exercise maximum restraint and adhere to the ceasefire as envisaged in resolution 1860 (2009).

While the easing of the blockade on Gaza by Israel is a positive step, we call for the total lifting of the blockade.

On Lebanon, we are concerned about the continued violations of resolution 1701 (2006). We call on all parties to fully implement that resolution.

I resume my function as President of the Council. As indicated earlier, I intend, with the concurrence of Council members, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.20 p.m.

Security Council

Sixty-fifth year

Provisional

6404th meeting

Monday, 18 October 2010, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rugunda	(Uganda)
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	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Afshar
	United States of America	Ms. Germain

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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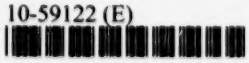

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Costa Rica and Ecuador, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it was so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the pleasure to address the Security Council today on behalf of the States members of the Non-Aligned Movement. I would like to start by expressing the Movement's appreciation to you, Sir, for convening this debate under your presidency to address the critical situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, at this crucial juncture as the moment of truth is drawing closer than ever. I would also like to express our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing before the Council today.

Despite all the serious and credible efforts exerted by different international and regional parties to ensure the resumption and continuity of direct negotiations on the Palestinian track towards the achievement of the well-known and internationally supported objectives of peace, a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine remains regrettably far from being achieved, as Israel, the occupying Power, continues to pursue its illegal policies and practices, which are not only endangering the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, but also rendering it practically impossible.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its call on the international community to be resolute in demanding that Israel, the occupying Power, abide by its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Quartet Road Map. Israel must cease its unlawful colonization in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; place a complete and indefinite freeze on all settlement activities, including so-called natural growth; and respond favourably and in good faith to the international consensus in this regard, including to the repeated demands of the United Nations, the European Union and the Quartet.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses grave concern over the many possible repercussions of Israel's determination to continue illegal settlement construction and not to extend the partial ban or the so-called 10-month moratorium on settlement activities. The Non-Aligned Movement stresses that serious and genuine negotiations cannot be conducted while Israel continues to carry on such illegal actions and provocations, which are totally contradictory to the known tenets of a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Moreover, Israel's continuous expansion of settlement-building in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem — the latest example of which is the recent announcement of the approval of 238 new housing units in East Jerusalem — destroys the mutual trust and confidence required for any successful negotiations and reveals that Israel has yet to abandon its expansionist goals and truly commit to the bases of the peace process, including the principle of land for peace. We reiterate our demand that Israel refrain from all such illegal and provocative actions aimed at prejudging the outcome of the final status negotiations, fulfil its obligations under the Road Map, and cooperate constructively with efforts to ensure the continuity of direct peace negotiations for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

In this regard, we are all aware of the unanimous global conviction that Israel must respect its obligations as an occupying Power as an imperative condition for materializing the two-State solution and creating an environment conducive to achieving a lasting solution based on the agreed terms of reference: resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008); the Madrid terms of reference,

including the principle of land for peace; the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

We are assured that the Palestinian Authority is, in word and deed, determined, with Arab support, to pursue the path of peace. This was reflected clearly in the statement of the Arab follow-up committee, convened in Sirte recently, and it is now incumbent upon Israel to show equal commitment, despite all the negative signals from the Israeli side in the past few months. Further, on the ground, the Palestinian Authority, with international support, also continues to exert efforts positively and constructively to lay the foundations and build national institutions in preparation for the independence of the Palestinian State. Those efforts must be fully supported.

On the Israeli side, however, we continue to witness growing acts of violence by settlers against Palestinian civilians, including children, as well as the burning of Islamic places of worship, orchards and agricultural fields. The Non-Aligned Movement is also alarmed by the increased issuing of additional home-demolition orders in occupied East Jerusalem and the revocation of residency rights of yet more Palestinian Jerusalemites, including elected Palestinian Legislative Council representatives. The Movement is deeply concerned regarding these illegal actions, which represent clear attempts to alter the demography and character of the city and to prejudge the outcome of the future permanent status negotiations, imperiling the basis of the two-State solution. Moreover, the Jewish loyalty oath bill, adopted recently by the Israeli Cabinet, represents yet another attempt to isolate the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel and to illegally force their movement outside the State of Israel at the same time that more Palestinian land is being seized and occupied by settlers supported by the Israeli Government.

The Non-Aligned Movement believes that concrete steps need to be taken during the coming period to immediately resume direct negotiations. The complete freeze of all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is essential for such a resumption. The international community should put forward a formula for a final settlement, or rather an endgame based on the well-known and internationally agreed parametres in this regard, which will lead to the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The situation in Gaza also remains among the Non-Aligned Movement's top priorities. The Movement reiterates that the unacceptable and unsustainable situation of the Gaza Strip has to come to an end. This unresolved crisis continues to have serious repercussions on the efforts for peace and to inflict deep suffering on the Palestinian civilian population. International humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions, must fully apply and be respected by the occupying Power. In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement emphasizes the need to press Israel to lift fully its illegal blockade, pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009), General Assembly resolution ES-10/18 and other relevant United Nations resolutions. This is essential to addressing the critical humanitarian and socio-economic situation in Gaza and to alleviating the many hardships being endured by the Palestinian civilian population.

In this connection, the Movement re-emphasizes the urgent need for the reconstruction of Gaza and calls on Israel to allow the import of essential reconstruction materials, including those necessary for the long-overdue reconstruction of United Nations facilities and schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to enable economic revival in Gaza. We reiterate the need for a sustainable regime for opening all Israeli border crossings with Gaza and enabling the free movement of persons and goods in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law.

Turning now to Lebanon, the Non-Aligned Movement remains deeply concerned over Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanese sovereignty, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement calls on all concerned parties to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragility and to avoid the recurrence of hostilities.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to thank you wholeheartedly, Sir, for convening this meeting. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Turkey and the members of his delegation for their efforts last month. I further thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing to the Council this morning.

This open debate has been convened in circumstances that do not augur well for the Middle East, given Israel's feverish efforts to obliterate our last hopes to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region through its unprecedented aggressive policies in the Arab territories occupied since 1967. While the entire world seeks to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and insists that the achievement of peace is an urgent prerequisite for the maintenance of international and regional peace and security, it is astonished by Israel's continued beating of the drums of war, appropriation of land, ongoing settlement activity, blockade of Gaza and threats to again expel millions of Palestinians from their homeland under the racist pretext of affirming the Jewish identity of the State of Israel — an outdated policy whose consequences are known to all.

These practices in no way indicate Israel's real intentions or a desire for peace on its part. Israel has already made its rejection of peace clear by refusing even to accept the modest request to extend the moratorium on settlement activity. Israel claims these days to be negotiating peace on the basis of the two-State solution, yet its settlement activities are on the verge of making that solution dead letter and without a chance of survival.

Peace is only as viable as the desire to make peace is translated into practical deeds. Political manoeuvring behind the smokescreen of paying mere lip service to peace only exacerbates an already tense situation and pushes it towards the precipice. We would stress once again that Syria's demands for peace are not the type of compromises that Israel claims to be making courageously and publicizing as painful. We are talking about usurped lands and rights that must be restored in full to their legitimate owners.

Syria and the Arab States have sought peace through the adoption of the Arab Peace Initiative, including the full restoration of usurped Arab rights, Israel's complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories to the line of 4 June 1967, the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, and the settlement of the question of Palestinian refugees in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.

However, Israel's answer to the Arab Peace Initiative has been its invasion of the West Bank, its 2002 massacres of Jenin and Nablus, its policy of continued expansion and settlement, and its appropriation of land and usurpation of natural resources and capabilities. Israel has not stopped at these cumulative, provocative excesses. It committed yet another act of aggression against Lebanon in the summer of 2006, followed by its aggression against Gaza in 2008, which killed thousands of Palestinian civilians and injured many, many more. Israel's crimes include the murder of humanitarian activists of various nationalities who tried to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza on the freedom flotilla.

Not satisfied with all this, Israel has continued to pursue settlement policies, build the racist separation wall, violate and desecrate holy shrines, lay siege to the defenceless Palestinian people of Gaza, and endorse decisions to Judaize the city of Jerusalem, the most recent of which was the decision to renovate certain parts of the old town. Moreover, Israel pursues its policy of collective punishment, the detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians and officials, and the abuse of detainees, including women, by Israeli soldiers.

The most recent of these racist Israeli decisions, adopted only a few days ago, concerns the requirement of non-Jews to pledge allegiance to the Jewish State. It is yet another expression of Israeli fascism, manifest in killings and racist laws that contradict twenty-first century calls for freedom and equality. They also contradict Israel's claim to be an oasis of democracy in the Middle East.

The Palestinian people still await international justice and expect us to come to their rescue. The question we must ask ourselves, however, is how long Israel will remain an entity above the law and accountable to none. How can we explain to the world the fact that the Security Council has chosen to remain silent vis-à-vis these crimes? Today more than ever before, the Council is called on to undertake practical and concrete measures, commensurate with Israel's

flagrant behaviour, to compel Israel to end its occupation of Arab territories. The international community must also strive to lift the deeply unjust siege of the Palestinian people of Gaza, open all the checkpoints, and reconstruct Gaza while providing international guarantees to prevent Israel from again destroying facilities and infrastructure there.

Israel continues to refuse to return the occupied Golan to its motherland, Syria, and to comply with the decisions of international legitimacy, particularly resolution 497 (1981). It pursues a policy of terror and oppression of the Syrian people of the Golan. It detains Syrian citizens of the Golan and continues to confiscate land in order to plant mines and expand settlements. We recall that Israeli mines in the occupied Syrian Golan injured 531 people, of whom 202, for the most part children, died and 329 were permanently disabled.

Israel continues to steal the water of the Golan. A few days ago, it drew water from the al-Ram dam in the occupied Syrian Golan, which led to a total loss of the reservoir's water and to the death of all fish there.

Here, we stress that Syria's sovereign right to the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 is not subject to negotiation. Our full recovery of the Golan is the basis on which any steps to build peace should be founded. As President Bashar Al-Assad has said, it is clear that the Israeli Government is not concerned about peace. Its main concern has been security in a very narrow sense — their settler, expansionist and hostile security, which in their view can be achieved only at the expense of our rights and our security.

It is illogical and not even acceptable that we Arabs have to continue to provide proof and evidence that we are seriously interested in peace, despite our repeated declarations and statements to that end on various occasions, in particular since the convening of the 1991 Madrid Conference. The Israelis must prove that. The Israelis must express in deeds, not only in words, that they are ready for a just and comprehensive peace. They should seek to convince us Arabs that they are sincere about it, because they are the ones occupying our land. It is they who aggress our people and displace millions of them, not the other way around. They are the ones who undertake all such acts and, above all, they use protection and promises as a guise to blackmail us and to gain further concessions.

The Israeli Permanent Representative tried this morning to distract the Council's attention from focusing on the Israeli occupation of Arab land. He vehemently tried to make the Council consider any issue except the central issue of peace. Why? It is simple — because its failure to mention ending the occupation and achieving peace means that Israel is trying to shirk its responsibility for ending the occupation and achieving a just and comprehensive peace, including the establishment of the Palestinian State.

Israeli State terror, on the other hand, is known to all. It is documented by many international and Israeli institutions intent on trying to uncover Israeli violations of the human rights of Arabs in occupied Arab lands. There are reports of the carnage, crimes, occupation and aggression of Israeli State terror, which has continued for more than 60 years. Israel has mastered State terror. It has committed all sorts of crimes in Qana, Jenin, Nablus, Gaza, Bahr el-Baqar, Deir Yassin and al-Quneitra. The terror has even extended to United Nations representatives, such as Count Bernadotte. Israeli State terror has targeted United Nations Members and peace activists, including the ship *Rachel Corrie* and Turkish victims.

It also included the first air piracy case in history when Israel hijacked a Syrian civilian aircraft in 1954. I repeat that Israel hijacked a plane in 1954 and shot down a civilian Libyan jet in 1971. Recently, as representatives well know, Israel forged passports of some of its allies to assassinate Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh, a Palestinian citizen in Dubai.

The list goes on. We recall what has recently been disclosed by classified Israeli documents concerning the 1973 war. These documents show that, by the second day of the 1973 war, Israel had prepared a nuclear bomb, with which it planned to attack the city of Damascus. That is in an Israeli document. Israeli State terror is a threat to the world's peace and security, as was made clear at the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in New York in May, when it unanimously decided to name Israel as the main obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

In conclusion, I wish to cite some excerpts from the Israeli press.

First, *Haaretz* has stated that high- or low-ranking Israeli leaders can expel any citizen from the occupied West Bank or any other Palestinian territory and that Israel may meet those who wish to extend their hand in peace and good-neighbourliness with more settlements and graves. *Israel Today* has written that if Israel really wants to pursue peace, it must stop following a policy of provocation and discrimination against the Israeli Arabs. *Maariv* has stated that Israel cannot conclude peace with Syria without giving up the Golan, but Israel is not prepared to do so. *Haaretz* has asked whether Israel's refusal even to discuss the Arab Peace Initiative meant that it must once again sacrifice thousands of soldiers, as it did in 1973, if it wishes to start genuine peace negotiations.

Maariv has written that no one objected to a rabbi publishing a book allowing a Jew to kill a non-Jew, and then asked why Israelis were astonished when mosques are quietly burned without any condemnation being raised. *Maariv* also has stated that Israelis have become a vindictive people who fail to see the misery of their neighbours, having been brainwashed and taught that the suffering of Arabs is not like their own, and that an Arab woman's mourning of her son's death is not as deep as a Jewish mother's grief.

Finally, *Yediot Ahronot* has stated that Israel is the only State that has occupied a people for 40 years, and yet it humiliates anyone who protests that fact. *Haaretz* has written that Israel's image had never been so low.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Shawabkah (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Council's meeting comes at a time when American efforts are intensifying and are coupled with an international undertaking to find an environment conducive to the success of direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Those negotiations are conducted with a view to reaching a two-State solution establishing an independent Palestinian State based on the lines of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, to live in peace and security in a stable and secure region, side by side with all States and peoples of the region, including Israel.

Jordan supports those efforts and calls on Israel to respond to them so that direct negotiations can be resumed and lead to a positive outcome that addresses all final status issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, security and borders. The parties must demonstrate their seriousness by adhering to peace. That requires halting all unilateral Israeli measures in the occupied West Bank — at the heart of which is East Jerusalem — including construction inside settlements, forced evacuation and deportation, confiscation of land and property, and policies of demolition of Christian and Muslim Palestinian homes and eviction of their occupants. It also includes all forms of archaeological excavations and digging tunnels under and around holy Christian and Muslim sites.

Beyond their illegality and unlawfulness, such measures violate the rules of international law and international humanitarian law. With them Israel is blatantly flouting its obligations as the occupying Power while impeding United States and international efforts.

Jordan welcomes the statement by United States President Barack Obama during the General Assembly's general debate last month (see A/65/PV.11) on the importance of achieving a two-State solution and the strenuous efforts to bring about successful negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the question of Palestine; no solution to the conflict can be effected without settling it via a two-State solution. The achievement of that solution and of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in conformity with international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, is of vital interest to, and enjoys the support of, the entire world, not merely the States and peoples of our region.

The Arab Peace Initiative, adopted in Beirut in 2002 and reaffirmed time and again at subsequent Arab summits, most recently at the Sirte summit in Libya this month, reveals the collective Arab and Islamic commitment to an equal, comprehensive, permanent and just peace. Unfortunately, that initiative has not received from successive Israeli Governments a response commensurate with its importance.

Here I would like to reiterate my country's view of the gravity and enormity of the consequences and dimensions of the absence of peace and stability in the Middle East. When His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al-Hussein always recalls the centrality of the Palestine question and emphasizes its priority and primacy over the other issues in the region, we proceed from the complete conviction that achieving a two-

State solution and a comprehensive peace is the only way to effectively and harmoniously resolve the other issues in the region, including manifestations of bigotry, extremism, terrorism and violence.

Jordan regrets the Israeli Government's decision not to extend the moratorium on settlement activities in the occupied areas. That threatens to derail the whole negotiating process, contrary to the wishes and demands of the entire international community — to whose will Israel pays no heed.

The President: I now give the floor to the His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Serrano: The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia; and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this declaration.

When we discussed the situation in the Middle East in July, the European Union and others expressed the hope that both parties to the conflict would very soon engage in direct, substantive discussions of all final status issues. That hope turned to reality when direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority started in Washington on 2 September, and later continued in Sharm el-Sheikh and Jerusalem. The European Union commended Israelis, Palestinians and the United States, as well as other Quartet and Arab partners, for bringing the start of those negotiations about.

Today we meet at a moment when efforts are being made to overcome the current deadlock in the negotiations — which began only a month ago.

There is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution. The European Union calls on all parties to earnestly seek a satisfactory way to keep the negotiation process active and moving, and eventually to gather momentum. We welcome the decision of the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee to leave the door open on the continuation of negotiations.

In this context, the European Union deems it indispensable that both sides show restraint and refrain from actions that could negatively affect the continuation of the process. To that end, both sides must uphold and implement previous commitments and strive to create an environment conducive to a successful outcome of the negotiations. The European Union stresses the need for the Quartet to continue to play an essential role in the peace process.

The European Union recalls that settlements in occupied territory are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. We regret Israel's decision not to extend the moratorium instituted by its Government last November. The moratorium has had a positive impact. We reiterate our call on Israel to end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem.

If there is to be a genuine peace, a way must be found, through negotiations, to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. The European Union continues to call for a complete halt to all violence, in particular rocket fire and terrorist attacks.

When the European Union High Representative, Catherine Ashton, visited the region at the beginning of the month, she discussed with the Palestinian Authority the work it is doing to build institutions for statehood. The European Union takes note of the assessment by the World Bank, which stated that if the Palestinian Authority maintains its current performance, it is well positioned for establishment as a State at any point in the near future.

The European Union stresses the crucial importance of the continuation of the Palestinian state-building process — including the implementation of the Fayyad Plan — which the European Union will continue to support actively.

Political and financial support of the entire international community is essential. The European Union urges those who have made financial commitments to deliver on their promises. All efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas must also be accelerated.

The European Union High Representative has visited Gaza twice this year and has praised the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for its continuous efforts to provide health, education and social protection services. The European Union has welcomed Israeli steps to ease the entry of goods into

Gaza, but reiterates its calls for full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings to enable the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, including goods from the West Bank. High Representative Ashton's discussions with the Palestinian Authority have also focused on how the donors can support exports, in order to allow the people of Gaza to gain a greater stake in their economy and their future.

The European Union calls for a solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns, including a complete stop to all violence and arms smuggling into Gaza. The European Union has offered its assistance towards achieving this objective. The European Union also calls on those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay.

The European Union also recalls that peace in the Middle East should be comprehensive and reiterates the importance of negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. As regards Lebanon, the European Union supports the Secretary-General's recent unequivocal statement reaffirming the independence of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The European Union urges all parties not to interfere in the Tribunal's work and not to prejudge its outcome.

The European Union reaffirms its full support to the Lebanese authorities and commends the crucial role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon. It also calls upon all parties concerned to implement all provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), to respect the Blue Line in its entirety and to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL.

These are the elements of the future — State-building, strong economic development, and security — and they need to be nurtured, but nurtured in the context of serious ongoing talks on all final status issues, which should lead to a two-State solution. The European Union reiterates its readiness to contribute substantially to the development of a comprehensive and sustainable solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Crowley (South Africa): South Africa welcomes this opportunity to again address the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We also wish to congratulate you and your delegation, Mr. President, for effectively and efficiently steering the work of the Security Council during the month of October.

South Africa wishes to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing delivered earlier to the Security Council. My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Egypt, who spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This debate is timely and takes place at a critical juncture in the latest round of stalled negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties. My delegation was hoping that we could address this meeting of the Security Council in the month of October on a more optimistic note, on a more hopeful note. My delegation was hoping that, at this point in time, some measure of progress would have been reached through direct negotiations, which would signal a forward-moving momentum that would place us firmly on the path of finding a sustainable and peaceful resolution of the outstanding permanent status issues and that would bring us closer to the realization of a two-State solution.

Our hope was based on some very positive and encouraging developments, including the efforts to resume negotiations between the parties through proximity talks, the continued engagement of the Quartet — and separately the United States of America — with the Palestinian and Israeli leadership, the resumption of direct talks between the parties on 2 September on all permanent status issues, and the continued support of the Arab League and Non-Aligned Movement, with the hope of seeing the direct talks achieve the ultimate objective of creating a two-State solution and ushering in a new era of Middle East peace and security. Those developments were significant and created an atmosphere at the international level conducive to moving the process forward and to ensuring that the Palestinians would realize their inalienable right of self-determination.

Throughout the period of negotiations, the resolve of the parties was severely tested through incidents such as the continued imposition of the inhuman blockade of the Gaza Strip, the continued construction of the

unlawful separation wall, and the violent assault by Israeli forces on the international humanitarian flotilla on 31 May 2010. Further threats to the negotiations stemmed from Israel's decision not to extend the settlement freeze when it expired on 26 September 2010.

In connection with the latter decision, my Government issued a statement in which it noted,

> "with serious concern that the partial moratorium imposed by the Israeli Government in November 2009 on the further construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian West Bank has not been renewed. The ten-month Israeli moratorium, which expired on 26 September 2010, was not renewed despite the resumption of direct negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders...".

Furthermore, the halting of settlement construction is seen by the South African Government as a commitment already agreed to by the Israelis during prior negotiations, including at the International Middle East Peace Conference at Annapolis, which took place in November 2007 and in which South Africa participated.

My Government further stated that

> "the continued building of new settlements threatens to halt negotiations between Palestine and Israel, as Palestinian President Abbas has repeatedly made it clear that in the absence of a halt to settlement construction, he would not continue with the negotiations".

The South African Government further noted that

> "[t]he first few rounds of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks held during September 2010 appeared to have demonstrated a clear intention by both parties to effectively move the peace process forward. The South African Government accordingly calls on the Israeli Government to honour its previous international commitments by putting an end to all further settlement construction in the Palestinian West Bank indefinitely. In so doing it will demonstrate its serious intention to bring about the establishment of a viable and fully independent Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel within internationally recognized borders".

During our negotiations to establish a democratic South Africa, my country also experienced moments that threatened to derail the negotiations process and tested the resolve of our political leadership. Focused on the broader goal of peace, democracy and reconciliation, the South African political leadership defied all those who sought to have them fail in achieving those objectives.

This is such a moment in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations process, where the leadership of Palestine is confronted with circumstances that make it difficult for them to count on the good faith that is necessary for negotiations. My delegation has always stated that a long-term solution to the challenges facing the region can only be achieved through negotiations. For that to happen, it is essential that a climate of mutual trust and peace be created and that the Israeli political leadership take the difficult decisions needed to ensure sustainable peace in the region.

We therefore call on the Israeli Government to desist from all actions that could have a negative impact on the negotiations process. Israel's current acts threaten to undermine the legitimacy of the process by weakening the Palestinian Authority as an equal partner in the negotiations process. The Palestinian Authority has come to the talks in good faith, expecting the full implementation of Israel's previously agreed commitments under international law, as well as relevant Security Council resolutions and Israel's Road Map obligations.

My delegation also calls for continued unity among the Palestinian political leadership which, in our view, would strengthen the negotiations process.

South Africa urges the international community, this body and all players concerned to exert all the influence necessary and pressure Israel to meet its obligations under various Security Council resolutions and under international law. The Security Council in particular has to shoulder its responsibility for ending the Israeli occupation and ensuring that the Palestinian people's right to self-determination is met.

My delegation remains convinced that the only viable solution to the challenges confronting the region is a political solution based on the creation of a Palestinian State coexisting peacefully alongside Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the implementation of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and

1850 (2008), as well as the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map.

Israel has an historic opportunity to move the peace process forward and to keep this flame of hope alive. If they do, they will ensure that the dream of a Palestinian State is brought a step closer and will bring within reach the realization of peace and security for themselves and for the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Let me begin by extending the appreciation of my delegation to you, Mr. President, and to the members of the Council for convening this open debate on such an important issue. We also wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement delivered earlier by the representative of Egypt, and the statement of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to delivered by the representative of Tajikistan.

This meeting of the Security Council has been convened at a time of great anxiety in the Middle East, following the convening last month of direct talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Regrettably, those talks are now in danger, as Israel did not extend the moratorium on settlement construction on the West Bank that expired on 26 September.

As one of the core issues, settlements remain the biggest obstacle to peace, as we have seen since the return to direct negotiations on 2 September. Israel's settlement policies and practices — which have been aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — are nothing but a blatant violation of international law. The transfer of civilians to occupied areas, whether or not in settlements that are under military control, is contrary to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which clearly states that the occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

Back in 1980 — 30 years ago — in paragraph 6 of resolution 465 (1980), the Security Council called on Israel "to dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem".

We therefore believe that the Council could take a similar step by pronouncing itself collectively, and with a single voice, to urgently demand that Israel dismantle the existing settlements and cease the construction and planning of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. If Israel has a genuine commitment to peace, and not propaganda about peace, it must stop all settlement construction, expansion and planning in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and dismantle the settlements built there, in compliance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The conflict in the Middle East has indeed been going on for far too long. For 60 years, the illegal Israeli occupation has made the region a theatre of tension and violence. On the Palestinian part, the nation has been facing hardship and surviving without a State. The list of suffering of the Palestinian people caused by the Israeli action is long and continues to grow by the day, week and year.

There is no doubt that Israel's illegal occupation since 1967, its excessive and disproportionate use of force and its policy of collective punishment are crimes against all we stand for: the values of humanity and the values of respecting the sanctity of the Charter. That is a clear violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

For many years, Indonesia has joined the international community in drawing attention to the consequences of Israel's continued illegal activity in occupied Arab territories. We therefore support the current surge in diplomacy aimed at relaunching negotiations and jump-starting a comprehensive peace process, as illustrated by ongoing efforts, in particular by the United States. On its part, the Security Council must, and indeed can, exert a positive influence on the Middle East peace process. Not least, that would send a signal that the Council is once again shouldering its Charter-mandated responsibilities.

In response to a suggestion by President Abbas during his recent visit to Indonesia, we recently convened an informal ministerial consultative forum on Palestine here in New York, which was attended by Palestine, Indonesia, Brazil, India and South Africa.

All of them agreed to hold consultations on a regular basis and to assist the cause of Palestine in every forum possible. For the immediate future, we will calibrate our course of action in consultation with Palestine, depending on the direction the direct talks are taking.

There is perhaps no international issue more important to Indonesia, and closer to our hearts, than the effort to find a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to bring to an end the illegal Israeli occupation that began in 1967. Therefore, the commitment of Indonesia to an independent, viable and democratic Palestine living side by side in peace and security with its neighbour is absolute.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Bouchaara (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would first of all like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this public debate on the situation on the Middle East. We would also like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the most recent events in the region.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as with those to be delivered by the representative of Mauritania on behalf of the Arab Group, and by the representative of Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. I should now like to make some additional comments in my national capacity.

The international community has followed with great interest and hope the positive signs that emerged in the month of September. Thanks to the flexibility demonstrated by the Palestinian side, with the support of Arab countries, as well as the efforts of the American Administration, direct Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations were relaunched in Washington, D.C., on 2 September, following 12 months of suspension. The resumption of negotiations, with the ultimate goal — as announced by President Barack Obama on 23 September in his speech in the General Assembly — is to reach an agreement that will bring in a new Member State into the United Nations, namely, a sovereign and independent Palestinian State living in peace with Israel.

However, that hope was quickly eclipsed by the persistence of the Israeli Government in its colonization policy after having refused to extend its moratorium. In addition, some days later, the international community learned of the decision by the Israeli Government, in spite of all the appeals made of it, to authorize tenders for the building of 238 housing units in the eastern part of the Holy City of Jerusalem. There is no doubt that this illegal decision is a serious development that could endanger the chances for renewing peace talks. As a response to those illegal measures, the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee, which met recently in Sirte, has confirmed the conviction of the Arab party that a return yet again to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations must be contingent on the total cessation of Israeli settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds.

My country, whose King, His Majesty Mohammed VI, is Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, wishes once again to express to the Council its deep concern about the decisions by Israeli authorities in the matter of the eastern part of Al-Quds, whereby it intends to modify the demographic composition of the Holy City and thereby undermine any possibility for success in establishing a viable Palestinian State. The persistence of such unilateral measures, which create an untenable situation, weakening those who work for peace and choose the path of dialogue to regain their legitimate rights, makes clear the policy of Israel towards the Arab population of the Holy City, especially the plan to raze 20 Palestinian homes in the Silwan neighbourhood.

It is worrisome to see that, even as they renew their commitment to achieve peace, Israeli authorities have continued throughout this past summer their policy of confiscating, seizing and expropriating lands for the construction of settlements, bypass roads and walls, thus leading to the expulsion of more that 600 Palestinians living in the eastern part of Al-Quds and the rest of the West Bank. Meanwhile, Israeli police continue to violate the compound of the Holy Al-Aqsa mosque. Given the central place of Jerusalem in the Middle East crisis, and what that city represents for all religions, we urge the international community, and especially the Security Council, to live up to their responsibilities and take action to put an end to these practices.

Today there is an international consensus about the need for a two-State solution and a comprehensive

peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the relevant decisions and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted in 2002. The international community, in recognition of the gravity of the cessation of the peace talks, must take a stronger and more effective position so as to create the basic conditions necessary to relaunch genuine negotiations to preserve the fundamental common interests of the peoples of the region and thereby ensure an environment of peace, security and cooperation.

Our deep concern about the proliferation of obstacles to restarting direct talks nevertheless goes hand in hand with our firm and unalterable conviction that the peace process is an inevitable choice and that it will result in ensuring a just and comprehensive peace in the region, in the interest of all its peoples, guaranteeing their security and the recovery of their rights.

In that regard, the Kingdom of Morocco continues to follow with great interest the increased efforts of President Obama and the Quartet and all international efforts, especially those of the European Union. We hope that they will lead to a return to genuine and sincere talks based on the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and past agreements and arrangements between the parties.

For its part, the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to work within the Arab Peace Initiative Committee to find through negotiation a lasting, comprehensive solution to all final status issues, especially that of Al-Quds — with the understanding that such a fair and comprehensive solution will only be possible if Israel withdraws from all Arab territories occupied since June 1967, including the Syrian Golan and the rest of occupied Lebanese territory, and if a viable Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital is created.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Mr. Aslov (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Group. First of all, I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for the very important briefing he has given us.

The stalemate in the Middle East process is very worrying, especially as it came as a result of Israel's attempts to dictate its own terms. The peace process cannot achieve genuine progress under the prevailing conditions. Israel should live up to its commitments and obligations, especially those stipulated by the agreements signed with the Palestinian side and enshrined in the Road Map.

It is self-evident that building Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, jeopardizes the peace process. It also sends signals about Israel's real intentions. Israel cannot pretend to make peace with the Palestinians and at the same time persist in stealing their lands for settlements. It is therefore the responsibility of the international community to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to refrain from actions that would undermine peace efforts. In order for the peace process to succeed, Israel should halt all settlement activities — including so-called natural growth — in all occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Also to be successful, the peace process should have a clear timeframe and clear implementation mechanisms.

The situation in East Jerusalem is a matter of great concern for the OIC and its member States. Israel's measures in occupied East Jerusalem are aimed at forcefully altering the historical character of the city. We consider Israel's decision to change the structure and shape of the centuries-old walls of the city an assault on its cultural heritage. Changing the demographic fabric of East Jerusalem through the expulsion of Palestinians from the city and expropriating their properties is a grave violation of international law.

The situation in Gaza is also very worrying. One and a half million Palestinians are living in harsh conditions as a result of the shameful, illegal and unjustified Israeli blockade. Israel must lift the blockade and allow the reconstruction of Gaza.

The OIC remains deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). We call on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land in the Shebaa farm lands, the Kfar Shouba Hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village.

The OIC also joins the international community in reaffirming that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The OIC demands that Israel abide fully and immediately by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The OIC Group would also like to stress that peace in the Middle East can be achieved only by ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab land occupied since 1967, establishing an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, and achieving a comprehensive and just solution for the plight of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

The international community and the Security Council in particular have a legal and moral responsibility to take prompt and decisive actions to ensure the implementation of relevant resolutions based on international legitimacy and to meet the challenges we face in maintaining international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mrs. Smith (Norway): A month ago, the international donor community met here in New York in the framework of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee to assess the progress made on building Palestinian institutions in the Palestinian territory. At that meeting, the World Bank reported to the donor community that the Palestinian Authority (PA) is now "well positioned for the establishment of a State at any point in the near future".

Over the past few years, the PA has made impressive efforts in building transparent and accountable institutions. Economic growth, combined with a steady decline in budget deficits, gives hope that the Palestinian economy is gradually moving towards financial sustainability. However, the World Bank report also stated clearly that this emerging State structure is not sustainable in its current form, but remains dependent on foreign aid.

Sixty per cent of the West Bank is still under full Israeli control. These areas are currently serving as military or environmental zones or are occupied by illegal settlements, and the PA cannot serve the Palestinian population in these areas properly either with regard to security or in ensuring proper infrastructure and utilizing the economic potential.

If the PA is to become independent of the support of the international donor community, it must be allowed to tap into the potential for economic growth that these areas hold. And the potential is substantial. Independent surveys suggest that the Jordan Valley could generate $1 billion-worth of industrial and agricultural output annually, and employ as many as 100,000 Palestinians.

East Jerusalem has traditionally been the engine of the Palestinian economy. Today, restrictions on the movement of goods and people have severed ties between the city and the rest of the West Bank, harming trade and economic growth. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements, exemplified by the recent decision to add another 240 units to settlements on occupied territory, only adds to the separation of East Jerusalem from the West Bank. The expansion of PA governance into these areas is necessary to secure economic growth and a sustainable Palestinian Authority.

At a time when direct talks have stalled over Israel's decision to continue the expansion of illegal settlements, it is worth recalling that the stakes are high. The Palestinian State structure is there and ready to assume statehood responsibilities. The donor community stands ready to carry its share of the burden in seeing the Palestinian State-building process finalized. In the international community, there is consensus that there is no alternative to the two-State solution and that detailed final-status negotiations over many years have dealt with many, if not most of the critical issues. Norway strongly supports all initiatives to bring credible negotiations back on track, and supports actions taken by the parties and the international community to underpin continued Palestinian State-building efforts.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. AlNafisee (Saudi Arabia): I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for a second

term. I should also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his detailed briefing on the subject today.

At the outset, I should like to express my appreciation for the convening of this debate to address the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, at a time when the Middle East has a dire need to resume direct peace process negotiations and to prevent a stalemate situation as a result of the ongoing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly East Jerusalem.

In spite of all of the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to restart direct negotiations towards the establishment of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, the Israelis continue to build these illegal settlements and bring more irrelevant questions to the negotiating table, such as the recognition of Israel as a Jewish State — a clear indication from the Israeli side that it is not seriously interested in reaching a just and peaceful solution, which is an internationally supported objective.

In light of the ongoing situation, my Government repeats its call on the international community to demand that Israel, the occupying Power, restart direct negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and halt all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular East Jerusalem.

Two years have passed since Israeli occupation forces invaded the Gaza Strip and the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009). Nonetheless, the widespread destruction of Gaza remains unabated, in spite of all assistance efforts. Israel's occupation forces continue to hinder the delivery of assistance by closing key crossings, increasing checkpoints, building a wall that now isolates Gaza from the rest of the world, pursuing a policy of collective punishment against the population of Gaza, and creating obstacles to the reconstruction process to heal the damage that Israeli war machine caused. All of these practices and others committed by the Israeli occupying forces clearly show the persistence of Israeli aggression towards the Palestinian problem.

Since Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1967, a bitter transformation of the holy city has displaced the city's Arab population to create a Zionist East Jerusalem. Stripping Arab citizens of their identities and resettling them elsewhere is akin to ethnic cleansing. The situation in East Jerusalem deteriorates daily as Israel's policies demolish homes, destroy identities, displace people and alter records in order to rewrite history and change Jerusalem's demographics. In light of these illegal activities, the Kingdom reaffirms its condemnation of the continued resettlement of Arab Israeli citizens and calls for the immediate cessation and dismantling of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

We reiterate that the building of settlements is illegal under international law and constitutes an obstacle to peace negotiations. If Israel claims that it wants negotiations and is committed to peace, then it should first cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories and dismantle existing settlements.

The Secretary-General confirmed in a recent statement the illegitimacy of settlement activity and called on Israel to fulfil its commitment, in accordance with the Road Map to peace, to freezing all new settlement, including so-called natural population growth, and dismantling all existing settlements built since March 2001.

The international community has demanded in concert the cessation of settlement activities on the basis of their illegitimacy. Will these demands be met with concrete action from our Security Council? Will the Council respond to the positions of concerned Member States by compelling Israel to stop new settlement activities and dismantle existing settlements?

Unfortunately, however, it is clear that things are not going in the right direction if we wish to reach the two-State solution, mainly due to Israel's insistence on continuing to build illegal settlements. Indeed, the Israeli Government announced last week the start of construction on 238 new housing units in East Jerusalem.

In Lebanon, the ongoing threat posed by Israel to the sovereignty of the people of that country further complicates an already complex situation.

Finally, Israel is ignoring or disregarding the call of the international community to start negotiations in good faith on the return of the occupied Golan to its legitimate owner, Syria.

The Government of my country hopes that the wish expressed by President Barack Obama at the opening of the sixty-fifth session of the General

Assembly, that the Palestinians will take their seat as a full member in next year's session of the General Assembly, will come true. We hope that Israel will avail itself of the opportunity of direct negotiations to respond, howsoever late, to the Arab Peace Initiative and prove that it is a real partner capable of making peace by participating in the two-State solution in order to end six decades of bloodshed, conflict and continuous threats to international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your successful presidency of the Security Council this month. I thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing on behalf of the Secretariat. I align myself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the statements to be delivered by the representative of Mauritania on behalf of the Arab Group and the representative of Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

This year has seen a serious move forward by the Quartet and the States sponsors of the peace process. The efforts of the United States resulted in the conduct of indirect negotiations and the launch of direct negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Arab countries have shown a serious desire for peace and created a climate conducive to stimulating the peace negotiations, but that will not continue indefinitely.

On behalf of the Arab States, in September 2009 the State of Qatar addressed a letter to the United States mediator seeking guarantees that Israel would go along with the Arab position. Now, more than a year later, the world has seen the radical positions of the Israeli Government, which evades its internationally agreed obligations and recently brought the negotiations to a deadlock.

The Israeli Government persists in its policy of illegal settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan, in defiance of the demands of the Arab Peace Initiative ministerial follow-up committee in its statements. The latest such statement was issued at the end of the meeting held on 8 October in the city of Sirte, Libya, under the chairmanship of the State of Qatar, before the special summit.

There is an international consensus that the Palestinian issue will be resolved when there are two States living side by side in peace. However, Israel's expansion of settlements, particularly around East Jerusalem, undermines the chances of achieving a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, and threatens the contiguity of the Palestinian territory as one of the basic components of statehood.

The Israeli Government seeks to justify the expansion of settlement activity by pointing to so-called natural growth. This concept is completely unacceptable because the settlements are neither legal nor the product of natural growth. The Israeli policy encourages settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly East Jerusalem, by providing Government subsidies and incentives to encourage the transfer of its civilian population to Palestinian territory, in contravention of international law.

In addition, the international community should not be deceived by the so-called temporary freeze on settlement construction. It is necessary instead to stop settlement activity and dismantle all settlements established in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions. A lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be based only on the principle of land for peace, the terms of reference of relevant Security Council and General Assembly decisions, and the Arab Peace Initiative, which will have to be reconsidered following a loss of confidence in Israel's intentions.

We emphasize that it is essential to engage all segments of the Palestinian population towards the success of peace efforts, and that our Palestinian brothers ought to do everything in their power to foster national unity in the interests of the Palestinian people and to guarantee the geographical and political unity of the Palestinian territory. However, it is wrong to think that the current crisis in the Palestinian national dialogue is a Palestinian issue alone, since the parties that called for the rejection of the results of the 2006 democratic elections caused a split in Palestinian ranks, thus easing pressure on Israel, the occupying Power.

It is equally important to provide protection from Israeli criminal acts, which are imprescriptible and

may require those liable to provide compensation under international law. It is high time to take action to ensure that such acts do not recur, particularly as they are catalysts of international terrorism. Furthermore, many of these acts are considered to be acts of international terrorism and have not been forgotten by the international community.

There is no need to describe these acts in detail, as there have been so many such Israeli attacks on many Arab countries, not to mention instances of murder through espionage and maritime piracy, the division of occupied territory and all-out military aggression with internationally prohibited weapons.

It is of critical importance to break the illegal and inhumane siege imposed on the people of Gaza as a whole. Worse yet, Israel impedes the efforts of the United Nations and others to rebuild what was devastated by the Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip. Is this civilized behaviour?

We reiterate our firm rejection of the illegal measures taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and its attempts to change the Arab identity, demographic composition, legal status and religious character of the city. We stress that all these attempts are null and void and without legal effect. The international community must reject the attempts of the Israeli Government to desecrate Islamic and Christian holy sites, demolish houses in the city, expel its Arab residents and withdraw their identities with the aim of Judaizing the city. Such attempts violate the obligations of Israel, the occupying Power, under international law, are in contravention of the relevant United Nations resolutions, and undermine the foundations of a peaceful solution of the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory continues, we must point out the ongoing Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701 (2006), which are summarized in the letters that have been circulated by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations. Those violations, which are acts of provocation and arrogance, must end if the Israeli Government does not seek to destabilize the region, as it claims.

Moreover, Israel continues to occupy the Syrian Golan Heights and to deplete its wealth. We reaffirm here the decisions of the General Assembly declaring the Israeli decision to annex the Golan invalid and call for its return to Syria, the implementation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and the return of the remaining occupied Lebanese territories to Lebanon.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): May I extend to you, Sir, my congratulations to Uganda for the successful handling of the work of the Security Council this month. We would also like to associate ourselves with statements made by the representatives of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Alignment Movement and Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. May I also associate myself with the statements made by my colleagues, the representatives of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and with statement to be made by the representative of Tunisia. I am sure we speak with one voice.

The resumption of the Israel-Palestine direct negotiations last month had rekindled hope for all of us for sustainable peace in the Middle East and a permanent political settlement of the Israel-Palestinian question. But I fear that our hopes and optimism appear to be short-lived, as the window of opportunity for meaningful and sustained negotiation is once again closing.

We need to extend our hands and grasp this fleeting moment of history, because we believe that the Security Council, the Middle East Quartet and the international community must act together in tandem to prevent the collapse of the talks. Today's open debate can effectively communicate a collective message, if we focus ourselves on three key areas so that the talks will now move in the right direction. The first one is the unconditional cessation of all settlement activity by Israel.

The international community must play a role in this. They must sensitize Israel to get it to announce its unconditional cessation of all settlement activity. Settlement activity violates international law, vitiates the atmosphere of the talks and mutes the voice of peace and compassion. It amounts to a colonization procedure of the Palestinian territory.

Settlement activity in recent times has shown numerous patterns. The more worrying trend is in and around East Jerusalem, where the status of the centuries-old prayer places, mosques, churches and cemeteries of the Palestinian people are being altered

in the name of excavation and the creation of new housing space. Violence by settlers against their Palestinian neighbours has become a routine, albeit regrettable corollary of that activity.

We note with particular concern the announcement made this past Friday by the Israeli authorities of their intent to build 238 housing units in East Jerusalem's neighbourhoods of Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev. Israel must stop this illegal activity. It must also end its calculated ambiguity on settlements in the West Bank, with a categorical renunciation of any new project. At the moment, we are allowing settlement activity to derail the negotiations or cast its threatening challenge as a shadow upon the peace process of the world.

Secondly, improvement in the lives of the Palestinian people is very important. This will indicate whether we are proceeding towards peace. The negotiation process must run in parallel with this. A myriad of checkpoints, roadblocks, military siege and separation walls cannot indicate peace and progress. This has infested the land of the prophets and the holy books and it must end. This must stop.

We acknowledge a set of measures taken by the Israeli authorities — and this is important — to ease restrictions on movement in the West Bank and to improve Gaza access. Such measures must be sustained by a deeper political commitment to improve livelihoods in Palestine through respect of human rights, freedom of movement and unrestricted flow of commerce. It cannot simply be a tap that can be turned on or off.

Thirdly, in order to believe that efforts are on the right track, there must be upgraded assistance to the Palestinian Authority. We must recognize this, especially regarding the plans announced in August 2009 for building the institutions of a Palestine State within two years. But we have continued to allow the denigration of the Palestinian Administration and economy. Many independent studies, including the Economic Monitoring Report prepared by the World Bank, have praised the performance of the Palestinian Authority in institution-building and delivery of public services. This has not found much voice in this particular forum and it needs to be said.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have projected an 8 per cent growth rate in the West Bank and Gaza. This is very creditable. This economic boom and entrepreneurship can be a solid edifice for the Palestinian statehood and for its people. And in fact, it can rebut violence. This holds immense promise for a lasting peace in the region and beyond. The economic and political momentum behind this significant change must not be lost. A strong and confident Palestine can better deliver peace, both at the negotiating table and in the streets of the region.

For lasting peace in the wider Middle East, we would also urge parallel progress on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We must encourage those negotiations to systematically move forward, along with all that we are doing here. Pakistan has always been supportive of lasting peace for all inhabitants of the Middle East — I repeat, for all of the inhabitants of the Middle East — irrespective of religion, ethnicity and nationality.

We continue to look forward to substantive and objective investigations by the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the freedom flotilla incident of 31 May 2010. We await a date for its publication. The freedom flotilla had embarked on a noble mission, and those killed aboard certainly deserve our attention. The Panel must diligently pursue the matter and bring it before this Chamber in a timely fashion, within the year. Justice must prevail and those affected must be compensated.

We share the common goal of the international community to achieve an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in peace with its neighbours. Our prayer today is that this open debate of the Council will bring us nearer to this peaceful objective.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jomaa (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank His Excellency Ambassador Rugunda. I would also like to congratulate his country, which is presiding over the Security Council this month, and him for the excellent way in which he has conducted the work and deliberations of the Council.

My delegation subscribes to the statements made by the representatives of Egypt on behalf of the

Non-Aligned Movement, and of Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The international community has placed a good deal of hope on the resumption of direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, which were launched in September under United States auspices. Many countries, including my own, and various international and regional organizations have expressed their support for these negotiations, aimed at reviving the peace process in the Middle East and at achieving a solution to the issue of Palestine on the basis of the well-known international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We had hoped that we would meet today at a time when negotiations were still ongoing. We encourage the parties involved to continue to make all necessary efforts to achieve the goals of resolving all pending critical issues and ending a long-standing conflict. Regrettably, these negotiations have been interrupted by Israel's refusal to extend the moratorium on settlements and its decision to resume settlement activity. Worse yet, the Israeli authorities have renewed their colonial activities at a time when the region needs dialogue and negotiations more than ever in order to achieve a global, lasting and just peace, which is in everyone's interest.

Arab leaders met at an extraordinary Arab summit conference in Sirte, Libya, on 9 October. The Palestinian question was at the top of the Arab leaders' concerns, especially in light of recent events. President Ben Ali of Tunisia made a statement at the summit in which he reiterated the steadfast support of Tunisia to the brotherly Palestinian people with a view to ensuring that they recover their legitimate rights over their historic homeland, especially the right to establish their own State on their national soil.

President Ben Ali called on the international stakeholders, the parties to the conflict and the Quartet to exert more pressure on Israel to end its policy of settlement-building, the Judaization of Jerusalem and its rejection of international legitimacy. The President also called on the international community to pursue its efforts to renew direct negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region.

The situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories has given rise to concern. The settlement policy pursued by Israel tends to undermine the Arab and Islamic character and identity of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. It also causes additional suffering to the brotherly Palestinian people, who have been deprived of their basic legitimate rights, including their right to create their independent State on their own national soil.

The situation requires all parties to take a firm stand and commit themselves to the principle of peace. Tunisia is strongly committed to the principles of international law, supports peace, and calls for a renewal of dialogue and negotiations to that end. However, Tunisia appeals to the parties to avoid deadlock and tensions that would only increase the threats to security and stability in the region and could undermine the prospects for peace to which our nations aspire.

As we discuss the situation in the Middle East today, I would like to reiterate my country's call for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in accordance with international law, so that all nations can enjoy peace and security and devote themselves to reconstruction and development and work for a better future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Iran): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Uganda's successful presidency of the Security Council this month and to thank you for convening this important meeting.

The Middle East is at the crossroads of the main divine religions of the world. It inspires a vast source of spiritual and philosophical perfectionism. Its divine spirit demands that it be a land of peace, justice and compassion, and not one of conflicts and human suffering.

It was in this spirit that the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Ahmadinejad, embarked on a State visit last week to Lebanon and was warmly welcomed by the people and the Government of Lebanon in an almost unprecedented manner. This warm reception of the President is indicative of the constructive role that the Islamic Republic of Iran plays in the region in general, and in Lebanon in particular. This fact has been confirmed by Lebanese

officials and all influential political figures and groups who are qualified to judge the positive effects of the visit, unlike those who look at this important and constructive regional event as an impediment to their wrong expansionist political agendas in the region.

It is therefore necessary for the international community, in particular the Security Council, and the Secretary-General to take into account the important and powerful role that the Islamic Republic of Iran plays in the region and to take advantage of it to maintain and consolidate peace and stability in Lebanon and the region as a whole.

If the Middle East is to see the prosperity and dignity it so deserves, the miserable plight and sufferings of the Palestinian people must end. We must not let the peace and stability of the region be constantly threatened by a regime that has a dark history of crimes and aggression. Clearly, more and more Palestinians see little justification in pursuing unequal peace with an unequal partner. The present Zionist regime of blockades, separation walls and checkpoints has led to the imprisonment of the entire Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank.

As has been stated again and again, the Palestinian issue is the core problem of the Middle East. It is this conflict which has, over the past six decades, spawned the ever-widening circle of Israel's confrontations with its neighbours and the Islamic world. It is this conflict which has contributed most significantly to the anger and frustration of the people of the Islamic world.

The consequences of our collective failure to bring peace, justice and compassion to the Middle East are disastrous for the region and beyond. What adds to the pessimism is the continuing grave situation on the ground in terms of the humanitarian plight of the Palestinians, in particular the people besieged in Gaza. Amidst this human tragedy, the ongoing provocative and aggressive actions of the Israel regime in the occupied territories have compounded the plight of the Palestinian people and made a just solution to the conflict all the more difficult.

An immediate end to the illegal practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people is the most important prerequisite for building an environment of trust and confidence. Trust and confidence, together with the active engagement of the international community, are the only way forward to peace.

In this context, there is an urgent need to address the Israeli nuclear weapons programme. Nuclear weapons in the hands of a regime with an unparalleled record of State terrorism and resort to aggression and to the threat or use of force against other countries presents a real threat to regional and global peace and security and the non-proliferation regime. This fact was underlined at the third Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in New York in April. This threat needs to be urgently and decisively addressed by the international community, and initiative for the creation of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East should be actively pursued.

In accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council has a significant and crucial role to play in supporting efforts to restore peace and justice in the Middle East by ending the suffering of the Palestinians and by putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, Lebanese territories and the Golan Heights. These are essential measures that need to be taken in order to bring lasting stability to the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): My delegation is pleased to have this opportunity to address this Council on this important issue at a crucial time for the Middle East peace process. I also wish to extend our sincere congratulations to Uganda on its assumption of the presidency of the Council and for the work done by the Ugandan delegation. We express our appreciation to you, Sir, for convening this debate.

I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, for his informative briefing on the situation in the Middle East. We associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The resumption of direct talks between the two leaders of Israel and Palestine on 2 September in Washington, D.C., with the facilitation of President Obama, indeed brought new hope to many who sincerely await a comprehensive resolution of the

question of Palestine in order to achieve sustainable peace in the Middle East. However, unfortunately, the stalemate continues despite the relentless efforts of many, including regional leaders, thus prolonging the plight of millions of innocent Palestinian civilians who have waited far too long for justice and their inalienable rights. Peace in the Middle East would be a major contribution to world peace.

We strongly believe that the ending of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and settlement activities remains central to finding a viable and just solution to the question of Palestine. Forty-three years of immeasurable hardship and disruption of normal civilian life would be a disturbing situation in any circumstance. We earnestly hope that the resolutions adopted by this body and the General Assembly will be respected and implemented without delay.

Hatred and violence only beget hatred and violence. Therefore, the consistent call by many concerned on all parties to the conflict to stop violence and exercise restraint needs to be heeded. It is the only way forward to ensure an environment conducive to lasting peace in the region. It is the most pragmatic way to build confidence and ease the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Once more, Sri Lanka renews its call on both Israel and Palestine to exploit all avenues in their quest for a lasting solution in which both sides could live side by side as neighbours within secure and recognized borders and bring Israel greater acceptance, both within the region and beyond.

We reiterate our support for the Government of President Abbas and commend the decision of the League of Arab States to keep the doors open for peace talks, despite the present deadlock. The Arab League has demonstrated moral leadership and political maturity with this decision. We believe that Palestinian unity should be restored through peaceful means for the sake of a strong and stable Palestine State. It is important that the national and democratic institutions of the Palestinian Authority be protected and maintained, as they will form the bedrock of a future Palestinian State, independent and self-sustaining.

It is therefore the earnest desire and hope of the Government of Sri Lanka that both Palestine and Israel, together with the major stakeholders of the Middle East peace process, will overcome the current impasse in their negotiations, and do so without delay.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to thank you, Sir, for having convened this open debate under your presidency on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his briefing.

We have observed and closely followed the negotiations launched on 2 September. We did not have to wait long before seeing once again which party would continue to create obstacles to peace in the Middle East. The occupying Power was quick to announce its intention to hold a referendum clearly aimed at creating conditions surrounding any outcome and at violating the Palestinians' right of return. In addition, Israel made the illegal and provocative decision to continue to build housing units in East Jerusalem. The Israeli expansionist policy also continues to include the demolition of Palestinian homes. More serious still is the policy of violence and xenophobia preached by the Israeli Government, inciting its citizens to violence with the aim of compelling the Palestinian Arab population to leave the lands that are rightly theirs.

Nicaragua once again reiterates its condemnation of the criminal blockade on the Gaza Strip and demands that Israel meet its international obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions. Israel continues to collectively punish more than 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, who live in that jail of 360 square kilometres under an air, sea and land blockade.

After having murdered nine Turkish activists aboard a humanitarian flotilla, the decision that Israel took in June 2010 to reduce restrictions and allow the entry of food and household goods was seen by some as a good start. However, in the light of events, that act was nothing more than a cosmetic touch-up of the genocidal blockade and an attempt to divert public attention from the situation.

The true aim behind the blockade is to keep the people supposedly alive, but in reality keeping them always on the brink of annihilation. The blockade also cuts off a people's right to sustainable development.

Proof of that, to give just two examples, is that since the start of the blockade, half of the agricultural land has become inaccessible and lies fallow. Also, most of Gaza's manufacturing facilities have closed their doors, with unemployment estimated at 40 per cent.

Returning to the attack on the humanitarian flotilla, with its characteristic impunity, Israel has refused an international investigation and has qualified the murder of those people as self-defence. Can the illegal boarding of a humanitarian flotilla in international waters be considered legitimate defence? It not being enough to attack the humanitarian flotilla in international waters, Israeli soldiers displayed the most brutal violence and were not satisfied with neutralizing their victims, but riddled them with bullets.

Likewise, Nicaragua condemns the continued violations of Lebanon's sovereignty in open violation of the Council's resolutions, as well as all measures and actions undertaken against the occupied Syrian Golan, which must be returned immediately by the occupying Power.

Nicaragua calls on all countries that have not done so to recognize the State of Palestine, but in particular on the Council's permanent members and those other States involved in the peace process, which have the greatest responsibility in that regard.

The General Assembly and the Council should take concrete steps to fully recognize the Palestinian State and its entry into this Organization as a full-fledged Member. It is simply shameful that the international community continues to favour the strong over the weak and the occupier over the occupied. It is unacceptable for the Organization to recognize a State that resorts to violence as a national policy and not recognize the Palestinian State, whose people have sought for more than 60 years peace and freedom to give their citizens a dignified life.

We must ask ourselves if Israel and its main ally will really take the decision this time to bring about, through dialogue and negotiation, the creation of a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders or if, respectively, they will continue to be victimizers and accomplices to a genocide that has already lasted more than six decades.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Pálsson (Iceland): The resumption of direct peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority earlier this autumn was a long-awaited event, raising hopes around the world that the parties might finally make progress on the final status issues.

Now, after a very short interval, there is a serious risk that the peace process might stall once again. Israel must assume the greatest part of the responsibility for that, having refused to renew its moratorium on settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

It is important to recall that the settlements are not simply a distraction or an obstacle to peace. They are illegal under international law, a product of the occupation and designed to further entrench the occupation. To call on Israel to immediately cease all settlement activity is therefore a legitimate request and, indeed, the international community's obligation.

Iceland remains deeply sympathetic towards the plight of Palestinians, now in the public eye due to the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the raid on the flotilla in international waters earlier this year. The raid was condemned by my Government and drew strong public reaction. Experts, mandated by the Human Rights Council, have now concluded that Israel violated international law by attacking the flotilla. We urge the Israeli authorities to work with the United Nations on the follow-up to the report (A/HRC/15/21).

Israel and the Palestinian side should also conduct independent and credible investigations, meeting international standards, into the serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law reported by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48).

The Government of Iceland strongly believes that the blockade of Gaza is contrary to international human rights and humanitarian law, inflicting collective punishment on the Gaza population. Accordingly, the Government of Iceland calls upon the Government of Israel to bring the blockade to an end and to ensure that the overall needs of the population are met.

Finally, Iceland firmly supports a peaceful resolution to the conflict and the two-State solution. A sustainable and just peace will not be achieved in the Middle East without the realization of the two-State

solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to congratulate you, Sir, for the work that you undertaking as President of the Security Council. We wish you success in your efforts.

We come here to reiterate our fervent desire for the prompt establishment of the Palestinian State and for peace in the Middle East. We associate ourselves with the statement made today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the efforts of the League of Arab States in support of the Palestinian people's self-determination.

The Government of Israel has violated the United Nations Charter on many occasions. The Permanent Observer of Palestine has sent 374 letters to the Secretary-General and the Security Council that relate the excesses committed against the Palestinian people by the occupying Power, Israel. Numerous reports by United Nations rapporteurs also confirm the outrages committed by the State of Israel. Thus there exists a comprehensive criminal record of its assaults that has moved and outraged the conscience of the world. Venezuela demands that the Security Council take charge in this matter and proceed without delay to apply the measures outlined in the United Nations Charter in order that the State of Israel complies with international law.

Illegal settlements and the practice of occupation, condemned by the Governments and peoples of the world, are part of the State of Israel's policy of aggression, which is aimed at perpetuating its occupation and depriving the Palestinian people of their inalienable right to self-determination and sovereignty. The occupying Power is carrying out an ethnic war and a racist and xenophobic policy aimed at the de-Arabization of Palestine.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in accordance with the views expressed by the Arab League, believes that the revival of Israeli colonization through the building of settlements on Palestinian land is a sabotage of the negotiation process being conducted by the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli Government. The continued construction of these settlements, which has been condemned around the world, affects the borders of a Palestinian State.

The Israeli Government has again shown that it does not have the political will to move forward with direct negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority. The United Nations should demand that the State of Israel refrain from further violating the norms of international law and from disrupting the negotiations currently being conducted.

Before the eyes of the world, the Government of Israel has amassed a voluminous record of violations of international law. Why does the Security Council permit the impunity of this occupying Power? We therefore request that the Security Council exercise the powers invested in it by the Charter of the United Nations to maintain and preserve international peace and security.

The Charter states in its preamble that it is necessary to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small and to respect obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela considers that the Security Council, by allowing the impunity of the State of Israel, has not complied with its obligations under the Charter. This body, unfortunately, is a prisoner of the right of the veto. That is why Venezuela has stressed the need to rebuild the United Nations. Among other things, that means eliminating the right of the veto in the Security Council and granting binding force to the decisions of the General Assembly, including those having to do with international peace and security.

In conclusion, I note that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has been admitted as a full member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. From that platform, or any other, we will support the struggles of this people, which seek to achieve their historical claims.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bolivia.

Mr. Solón (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, the Plurinational State of Bolivia would like to associate itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia condemns Israel's continuing military occupation of Palestinian territory, perpetrated through systematic violations of international law and United Nations resolutions. In that regard, we call on the international community to show solidarity with the Palestinian people in the tragedy they are experiencing. With courage and dignity, they are continuing to cope with persecution, closed areas, shortages of food and drinking water and edicts by Israel that violate human rights and the Geneva Conventions. Israel is also continuing to impose widespread displacements that affect thousands of Palestinian families.

Since the last open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (see S/PV.6363), the international community has continued to make various efforts to put a stop to violence, terrorism and the loss of innocent Palestinian lives in the region. Nevertheless, we continue to witness the perverse consequences of the occupation by a foreign Power. The serious economic effects of that occupation have deprived the Palestinian State and its inhabitants of their legitimate right to exist.

Along with the blockade and war in the Gaza Strip, we also cannot remain indifferent to the alarming direct and indirect costs of Israeli's closure policy in the West Bank. According to a report (TD/B/57/4) by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), that has led to a loss of $3.1 billion over the past three years. The same UNCTAD report highlights the fact that in 2009 the trade deficit with Israel reached $2.6 billion. That figure exceeds the value of all the assistance that the donor community provides to Palestine.

These and other serious constraints in Gaza and many areas of the West Bank, which serve to increase disparities and fragmentation in the occupied Palestinian territories, only highlight the unjust practices of the occupying Power, Israel.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia would like to express its strong solidarity with the pain of the Palestinian people. We vehemently reject Israel's unnecessary destruction of thousands of Palestinian homes, businesses and vital civilian infrastructure, including water and sanitation facilities that are essential for ensuring the fundamental right to water and sanitation, which has been recognized by the General Assembly as a human right.

We condemn Israel's use of access to water as a way to evict the Palestinian population from its territories. The Plurinational State of Bolivia urges Israel to end all its illegal settlement activities. We demand that Israel halt its illegal practices against the Palestinian people, put a definitive end to its illegal blockade of Gaza and immediately allow the permanent opening of all crossing points for the movement of people and goods into and out of the territory, which is necessary to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and allow for immediate reconstruction and the economic recovery of the Palestinian people.

The international community has a responsibility to ensure that the most reliable possible investigation is carried out on all the violations and crimes committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip. It is in precisely this important framework that the Committee of Independent Experts appointed in accordance with the Human Rights Council resolution of March of this year on the follow-up to the Goldstone Report can pursue its work.

The negotiations that need to take place in the framework of the peace process are often disrupted by illegal settlement activity, which is obviously aimed at the illegal acquisition and de facto annexation of more Palestinian territory, thereby imposing a unilateral solution, which has clearly been shown in the last few days by Israel by refusing to extend a moratorium settlement.

Bolivia considers that the conduct of the peace process between the parties should be based on the fulfilment of agreements and the cessation of settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which is essential to establishing an atmosphere of trust in the region.

In this context, the Plurinational State of Bolivia would like to make an appeal for the international community to take urgent measures to make sure that Israel as an occupying Power comply with all of its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions, as well as the advisory opinion and its obligations under the Road Map.

Bolivia would like to place its hope in the continued international efforts of the international community to fulfil the just aspirations of the

Palestinian people for whom we would like to resolutely express our support and solidarity.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): Mr. President, let me begin by thanking you for chairing this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I also would like to convey our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his insightful and comprehensive briefing this morning.

I also wish to state that the delegation of Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt and Tajikistan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively. In addition, I wish to briefly make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, has always been a major concern for the international community and the United Nations. A durable and sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of Palestine, which is the core of the long-lasting crisis, must therefore be our collective strategic objective. All Member States should pledge complete commitment to this objective and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Bangladesh is always ready to play a constructive role in this collective endeavour to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the two-State principle. Bangladesh joins with the international community in reaffirming its full support for the Palestinian people in its just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and freedom from continued occupation.

The people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental rights to self-determination and to live freely in their own land. Displaced Palestinians have been denied their right to return home and live in dignity and safety. Unfortunately, it appears to have been a collective failure on the part of the international community and, even more so, of the people of Israel, who despite having endured deprivation and sufferings has failed to rise to the occasion and guarantee the people of Palestine its fundamental rights to self-determination and a sovereign State of its own side by side with Israel.

In order to achieve a lasting solution in the Middle East, it is very important to address the key issue, which is the prolonged and illegal occupation of the Arab territories by Israel. The solution requires Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied Arab lands.

We are nevertheless heartened to see a new beginning in the peace process. It is encouraging that President Mahmoud Abbas met with the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, last month and started direct talks, which had remained stalled since 2008. Let us hope that their meeting is a step in the right direction towards the two-State solution. Let us hope that they will adopt a mindset conducive to lasting peace and that Israel will stop its illegal eviction of Palestinian residents and end its settlement projects as steps towards the realization of the two-State solution.

The international community is eagerly waiting for a breakthrough. Can we be optimistic that this modest beginning of direct talks will end up in consolidating the peace process? My delegation believes that direct negotiations will only be successful if there is sustained regional and international support for the talks, the parallel process of Palestinian State-building and the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive regional peace, as envisaged in the Fourth Geneva Convention, the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978), the principle of land for peace, and the Madrid terms of reference, which provide for Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories back to the 4 June 1967 line, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which are the best guides for achieving a two-State solution and for guaranteeing Israel's security and stability.

The two sides should, as soon as possible, settle the core issues including the status of Jerusalem and the return of the Palestinian refugees. Let me urge the international community, especially the Quartet, to ease the financial burden of the Palestinian Authority. There should be renewed commitments to increase financial assistance to the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Bangladesh's long-standing position that the continued illegal occupation of Palestine over the past six decades is the root cause of the violence, unrest and destabilization in the

region. Let me also reiterate our full support for a lasting peace for all inhabitants of the region, both Arabs and Israelis, and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in peace with all its neighbours, including Israel.

The President: I shall give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): The situation in the Middle East and the conflict between Israel and Palestine are matters that have burdened the United Nations and the Security Council for more than six decades now. For those who have followed the events, and particularly the discussions in the Organization, our attention is drawn to the repetition of statements and denunciations not just by the parties, but also by other participants. It is only when leaders with the stature of true statesmen and stateswomen have lifted their eyes above the immediate disputes to look to the horizon, trying to put into true perspective the material costs but especially the human costs as well, in order to move beyond nationalist and sectarian impulses, that we have seen really meaningful steps being taken. It is thus that today, more than 60 years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and more than 10 years after the deadline established in Oslo, we again see the hope of a renewal of direct negotiations between the parties, so that there can be a settlement of all matters related to the final status within a year. We therefore now need leaders who are willing to abandon business as usual and thinking in terms of confrontation, and who will instead think in terms of peace and cooperation. There are some positive signs in that regard. In the light of those events, my statement today is different from the statements we customarily make here.

Costa Rica is not unaware of the difficulties facing Israeli and Palestinian leaders. We do not ignore the goals, aspirations, rights, pressures and the weight of history that lead each party to distrust the other and to think that tomorrow, or in three or 30 years' time, they will be in a better position to achieve their ultimate goals. But that is nothing but a mirage and has shown itself to be just that — a mirage, not the way towards an oasis.

The current leaders of Israel and Palestine have found a way to come to the table and reach agreements. Moreover, above and beyond the pressures, both parties are aware of the central features of what must be a final agreement to the conflict. The basis for a solution should be the acceptance of two States within secure and recognized borders whose inhabitants live free from threats of being pushed out of their homes and lands or being kidnapped or subject of rocket attacks — and who instead cooperate to increase production, bolster access to health and education and strengthen the prospects for a peaceful and hopeful future.

There is a possible agreement on the table. It still requires fine-tuning and necessary elements that complement, and not substitute for, the crucial conditions, namely, the establishment of a Palestinian State and the signing of a genuine and secure peace.

As we have said on numerous occasions, Costa Rica believes that the only sustainable solution to the conflict in the Middle East is one based on absolute respect for international law — not on force. Today, the road to sustainable peace entails respect for international humanitarian law and human rights. The parties should focus on the central aspects of the conflict. That was essentially the message that President Laura Chinchilla brought to her meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas here at Headquarters in September.

I would like to express our satisfaction with the implicit support expressed by the Arab League at its meeting in Sirte, Libya, for President Abbas to continue negotiations with the Israeli side, despite the end of Israel's unilateral moratorium on construction. However, that hopeful sign is not open-ended. The parties should find a way to relaunch a constructive dialogue.

Costa Rica continues to support the efforts of Palestinian officials to restore Palestinian unity on the basis of the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization. While President Abbas and his team have used the guidelines to improve security conditions and free their people from violence, Palestinian unity has been systematically weakened by radical groups that pose an obstacle to the well-being of the people they claim to defend. Israel also needs to be able to count on valid interlocutors who can negotiate and bring an end

to the conflict. In that context, Arab countries are also strategic partners in peacebuilding. They should therefore help the Palestinian Authority to prevent the conflict from becoming a vehicle for the actions of extremists.

We know that that is not an easy process. We also know that the conflict has its roots in disputes both old and new. Costa Rica does not ignore, nor are we disingenuous about, the difficulties involved in reaching agreements to disputes between countries and peoples. But we also know that peoples and leaders come to a moment when they understand that they must put aside some of their aspirations and goals in order to achieve others that are surely more important.

Human lives and the well-being of the children of today and tomorrow are more important than promises to defeat an enemy. In the face of a spirit of confrontation and heated passions, Costa Rica calls for a spirit of peace, understanding and good faith. Let us remove obstacles from our path, be they large or small, and call for agreement on what is necessary and crucial.

If the Organization wishes to play its role in this conflict, it is time that it speak up to encourage those who are reasonable, those who want to find solutions. It is time to silence fanatics and extremists, wherever they come from. Their voices and their evil predictions should be overcome by providing support, tranquillity and confidence to those who in their very homes distrust international diplomacy. We must give them reasons to have faith and to trust. Costa Rica calls upon the parties to give their best and seek a meeting of the wills.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): As Chair of the Arab Group for October 2010, I have the pleasure to address the Security Council at this meeting on the item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Uganda's accession to the Council presidency for this month. I also congratulate Turkey on its outstanding presidency of the Council last month. I also thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

The Council's debate today is taking place at a time when Israel is continuing its disregard for the international community by its intransigent position of choosing the policy of regular assassinations, displacement, settlement construction and house demolition on a daily basis. That behaviour is brutal, criminal and illegal, and at the same time it constitutes a blatant breach of international law, including the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Israel's disregard for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, constitutes a grave danger, which makes it necessary for the Council to shoulder its responsibility with regard to Israel's intransigence.

The Arab Group affirms that we cannot and should not divorce reality on the ground from the efforts being made to achieve peace through the two-State solution based on the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), so as to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their full and legitimate rights, establish a sovereign independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and ensure the return of Palestinian refugees to their lands. We welcome the statement by American President Barack Obama to the General Assembly on 23 September 2010 (see A/65/PV.11), in which he talked about the establishment of a Palestinian State in the course of one year.

The peace efforts in the Middle East — including the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map adopted by Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) and the efforts of the Quartet, which command the full and complete support of the international community — must be bolstered by accelerating their implementation, for the sake of terminating the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieving genuine peace based on the principle of land for peace. Peace will be achieved only with the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace side by side with Israel.

In that connection the Arab Group calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility for the withdrawal by Israel, the occupying Power, from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in line with Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Arab League Summit held in Beirut on 28 March 2002.

The Arab Group calls on the Security Council to force Israel, the occupying Power, to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention, on the protection of civilians in time of war, to its Syrian prisoners, some of whom have been in prison for more than 25 years. The Arab Group would like to draw the Council's attention to Israel's continued intransigence in refusing to comply with resolution 497 (1981), on the Syrian Golan, in its settlement policies, confiscation of land, diversion of water resources and imposition of Israeli nationality on Syrian citizens.

We call on the Council to force Israel, the occupying Power, to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from the Sheba'a farms and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village, as well as from the Kfar Shouba Hills.

With regard to occupied East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, we would like to put an end to clear Israeli violations of international law that aim at creating a Jewish majority in East Jerusalem by evicting Palestinian citizens, forcibly displacing them, revoking their residency permits and replacing them with illegal Israeli settlers.

The Arab Group emphasizes the dangers to which occupied Jerusalem is subjected, particularly al-Haram al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, given the persistent Israeli violations. The continued attempts to demolish the Al-Aqsa Mosque as well as the violations in the city of Jerusalem are part of an Israeli plan to Judaize occupied East Jerusalem, attempts that will undermine peace efforts internationally and regionally.

International reports frequently emerge on the situation in Gaza, all of which emphasize the gravity of the situation inside the Gaza Strip, given the unjust, inhuman, strangulating and illegal blockade that has lasted more than three years, paralyzing Gaza's economy and destroying the health and living and social conditions of more than 1.7 million Palestinians.

The Arab Group demands the unconditional and immediate cessation of all settlement activities, without exception, including those in Jerusalem, as a sine qua non for the achievement of peace. We call upon Israel to immediately, without delay, lift the inhuman blockade of Gaza. Negotiations can never resume as long as settlement activity by Israel, the occupying Power, continues. The international community, particularly the Security Council, must grapple with the unjust stance of Israel and should decisively reject Israel's provocative and destructive position. Israel should abide by international law, because the alternative threatens not only the peace process but also international peace and security.

Last but not least, the Arab Group is of the view that the international community, particularly the Security Council, must strongly call upon Israel, the occupying Power, to halt all its blatant violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. Israel should cease settlement activities and return to sincere negotiations to establish an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel. It should completely and unconditionally withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. The Security Council should redouble its efforts and take further concrete and effective measures at this critical juncture in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Lalama (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Ecuador is pleased that the Security Council has once again provided an opportunity for an update on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, and congratulates you, Sir, on your conduct of the debate. We also wish to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

Ecuador associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I am pleased to confirm once again Ecuador's position on the conflict in the Middle East, and that is total respect for the norms and principles of international law, especially in matters of the peaceful resolution of conflicts; condemnation of the use and threat of use of force; and compliance with the resolutions of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies. In that vein, we support all the resolutions of the Security Council.

True to that commitment, my delegation condemns the acts of violence that continue in the region, because not only do they violate international law, but they also make it difficult to reach understanding between the parties.

The crisis in which we find ourselves forces us to seek actions and decisions to achieve peace. That requires that Israel respect the law and the resolutions

of the United Nations. The people need the international community, in accordance with humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions, to demand, once and for all call in a clear and firm way, that Israel cease all harassment activities in the region and stop the settlement activity that it conducts by force in the area, including in East Jerusalem.

The settlements are illegal and unjustifiable. They exacerbate tensions, run counter to the principle of land for peace, which has been supported by the international community since 1979, and hamper the peace process between the parties.

If Israel rejects the efforts, appeals and calls of the international community in such a way as to prevent the peace negotiations, then the Security Council should take concrete action — as should all the relevant organs of the United Nations — so as to ensure that Israel suffers the consequences of the violations and crimes it has perpetrated, especially in Gaza and East Jerusalem.

My delegation renews its condemnation of the acts being provoked in the region, not only because they violate international law but also and most importantly because they block understanding between the parties.

The region cries out for a solution. We urge the parties to come to a settlement of the conflict that is peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive, and to make efforts to re-establish the dialogue that will lead — via the effective fulfilment of the Madrid commitments, the Israeli initiative and implementation of the Road Map — to achieving stability and peace in a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, must coexist side by side within secure and recognized borders.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.